BLAZBLUE
PHASE-SHIFT
1
原案・監修：森利道（アークシステムワークス）
著：駒尾真子
ドラゴンブック

Novel Illustrations

"You interested in *Azure*?"
There shouldn't be anyone else with the exception of Kazuma.
Within the room that should have been empty... an unknown person was there.

"HURRY UP AND DIE ALREADY, YOU SHITTY CAAAAAAT!"
"————OUROBOROS!!"

From the edge of the lenses, drips of royal milk tea fell to the table.
"...My glasses, have been stained."

ぽたり、と。レンズの縁から
ロイヤルミルクティーの滴がテーブルに落ちる。

ドラゴンブック
ふ-1
2-1

BLAZBLUE ―ブレイブルー―
フェイスシフト1

原案・監修：奈須きのこ
著：成田良悟

カバーイラスト／加藤勇樹（アークシステムワークス）
カバーデザイン／宮脇裕美

ドラゴンブック

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西暦2106年。世界が「黒き獣」の脅威に怯えていた時代。魔道協会が治める島「イシャナ」で平凡な日々を送る学生・カズマがユウキ＝テルミと出会う時、歴史は新たな転換を迎える。
「〈書〉を手に入れれば、テメェはなにもかも取り戻せる。失ったものも、忘れちまったものも、なにもかも」
それは破滅への序曲か、それとも救いの福音か――。
光と闇の狭間で「希望」と「絶望」が交錯する「BLAZBLUE」完全公式ストーリー、新章開幕！

DRAGON BOOK

★STEINS;GATE　シュタインズ・ゲート
円環連綿のウロボロス①
円環連綿のウロボロス②
比翼連理のアンダーリン①

★BLAZBLUE　ブレイブルー
フェイズ0
フェイズシフト1

★GOD EATER
～アリサ・イン・アンダーワールド～
～ノッキン・オン・ヘブンズドア～

★Gideon　ギデオン
The man whom God disliked

★キャザリン

★コープスパーティー
Book of Shadows

★モンスター・コレクション・サモナーズ
アルフレアの千死鳥
ソラステルの堕天使

Prologue

The sounds of several people's footsteps were advancing in the long, dark corridor.

Within the darkness, they passed through ten heavy doors that had been built. One by one, they opened the doors with their hands as they walked.

Each time a door was opened, the darkness that was filling the surroundings grew thicker. Their feet should have been stepping on the solid floor of the corridor, but there was an illusion as if their feet were going to a deep, deep bottomless abyss.

The figure that had been leading halted her feet.

A light sphere which was as big as a clenched fist was floating on air. The pale white light illuminated the vicinity. The light, which was created by using magic, shone on a door that was previously covered in darkness.

It was a wooden door. It was quite simple, different from the doors they had passed up until now. It was far from strong.

There was a magic circle drawn on the door.

"...Here, eh."

Near the door, the figure who made the light and had been leading, muttered an affirmation.

It was a slender and tall woman who had a glamorous appearance. Still in her youth, the firm legs which were extending from the short skirt were beautiful. With long hair flowing down her back, there was a big triangular hat like a witch from fairy tale would have placed on her head. She was called Nine.

"A wooden door with a sealing magic circle... It indeed feels secure."

Since the wood was really old, it had good affinity with magic. It

helped strengthen the magic.

Even though it looked fragile, in reality, it protected its inside more stubbornly compared to the doors they had passed so far.

"Naturally... Something with that extent exists inside."

Behind Nine, a low voice groaned.

It was a tall man in his prime age. The long hair on his back was tied up. His body was dressed in formal clothes. However, the body shape that arose on his first-rate shirt suggested that his body had been trained to fight. His name was Valkenhayn.

"While Clavis-sama was still alive, he personally sealed this place. It is not something that can be disengaged easily, even by the Ten Sages of the Mage's Guild."

"Are you testing me? Well, that's fine."

"Don't be so belligerent, Nine. Be careful."

Glaring at Nine, the nearby third figure reprimanded her.

In contrast to Valkenhayn, the person had a build so small even compared to Nine. No, the silhouette was not of a human. The triangular ears sticking out from the top of his head, limbs which depicted a lenient curve, the swaying and shaking tail that branched into two on his back.

His name was Jubei, a beastkin warrior who was formerly known as Mitsuyoshi.

"*Clavis* had made the seal to be this strong. Keep that in mind."

"...I know."

After she answered Jubei's words with a low tone, Nine turned around to face the door as if challenging it.

The airspace, and also the seal. Nine, Jubei, and Valkenhayn knew the man who created those.

Clavis Alucard. A vampire who had lived no less than a thousand years, continuously watching over the history of mankind.

He was no longer here. He had died a little while ago.

Just before that, he had stated his will to the butler Valkenhayn.

He had said... if a magician called Nine visits this seal, and also if she requires the content of the seal, guide her to this place and let her do as she pleases.

Nine entrusted the magic light to Valkenhayn. Then she held up both of her hands to the magic circle.

The seal slowly unraveled, as if melting.

After a little while, the magic circle that had emerged disappeared as if it was burning down.

Nine unhesitatingly opened the door.

Ahead was a completely plain small room. The floor, ceiling, and walls are made of old wood. Its purpose was to reinforce another seal inside the room.

"Nine."

As if holding back Nine who had took a step into the room, Jubei let out a cautious voice.

Nine halted her feet, but didn't look back.

"I'm fine alone. Rather, it'll be a hindrance to my magic if there's a lot of people."

"...If somethin' happens, quickly notify us. Okay?"

Even if he had faith her, he still worried. Leaving Jubei's voice behind her, Nine shut the door.

Immediately, all sound faded away.

Disconnected from outside, that place looked like an isolated cage

of wood that didn't belong to any kind of space.

Nine created a small light once again.

Lying in wait inside the darkness was a young man. He sat down on the floor, with both arms hanging on the wall.

When his appearance could be seen clearly, Nine's expression took a steep change. It by no means because of fear or she was being cautious. The fact that her gaze became sharp was because none other than pure anger.

"You are... *Yuuki Terumi*?"

Nine's voice was shivering with fury.

Struck by the magic light, the young man slowly raised his head while still inside the dark shadows.

His mouth smirked in the shape of crescent moon.

That moment, Nine raised her supple leg up high and sent a kick to the side of the young man's face who smiled eerily.

"This can't be... Don't mess with me! Why are you...!"

Giving herself to anger, Nine repeatedly kicked the head, cheek, and mouth of the young man.

The young man's head violently shook, his seemingly unhealthy pale skin split open, his cheeks and mouth became stained with red, his green hair disheveled.

A moment later, the young man's head crashed on to the wall behind him with a particularly loud noise.

Her chest began to rise and fall as her breathing became ragged, Nine lowered a high heel to the floor as if striking it. Then she brushed her hair back into place behind her back, as it had begun to obstruct her view.

Looking at it, the restrained young man raised his completely

wounded face and smiled. The countless wounds healed rapidly, and disappeared.

"Ooh, scary, scary. Don't you know a woman's hysteria is hated?"

"Don't talk pointlessly."

Toward the young man's smile which was filled with mockery, Nine retorted with a sharp voice.

"...That's right. I don't have the time to waste talking with you. There's no time left for us after all."

"Time? Time, time, time, huh... Not that it's got anything to do with me～."

"That's not the case."

Nine said firmly.

The young man who was bound with magic stuck his chin out, purposefully giving Nine an exaggerated look.

"Huh? Whoa whoa whoa, you're in an awful hurry, ain't you? How unusual～."

As if interrupting his words, a stiff noise rang out. It was the sound of Nine kicking Terumi's head.

"Didn't I say not to talk pointlessly? ...You trash."

Nine struck the floor with the sharp heel. Her mouth was trembling with boiled up anger and contempt.

"Yuuki Terumi. Lend your strength. For the sake of eradicating that monster."

With a quite sharp tone of voice, Nine directed her gaze to the young man who was referred to as Yuuki Terumi.

The young man——Yuuki Terumi sneered.

"You asking me for help, Nine of the Ten Sages? This seems

serious... But you know, is that the kind of attitude to request a help from someone? You should at least kneel down first. Hehehe."

Again, the high heel kicked Terumi. This time was stronger, even when compared to the previous kicks.

"...You don't have the right to refuse."

"Ow ow... My head isn't a soccer ball..."

Cursing her, he spat at Nine's feet.

However, upon raising them, Terumi's provocative eyes immediately stiffened and opened wide.

Nine's thin finger was pointed at Terumi's forehead. The tip of her finger was shining with a cold purple light.

Terumi instantly understood the meaning of it.

"Enforced Restraint
Mind Eater
...!"

A magic to restrain soul and control over thoughts.

As Nine's voice spoke of inexplicable words, the light on her fingertip went inside Terumi's forehead.

"Tch... You bitch, do you think that sorry-ass magic can do anything to me!? Bullshit! Don't screw around!"

"We'll know soon enough."

"Hey hey hey. Tell me you're joking! Seriously, don't play tricks on me! Hey, you hear me, you damn bitch!?"

With his body furiously struggling, Terumi tried to escape from Nine's magic.

Yet the small but cold purple light mercilessly, in accordance with the user's hateful mental state, obstinately ate away at the target's

brain and nerves deeply.

And then the light swallowed Terumi's white forehead completely.

...The small wooden cage became very quiet.

"...With this, it's over. That was disappointing."

As her mutter broke the silence, Nine released the magic that was binding Terumi. The sound of glass breaking rang out, and then it was sucked into the darkness.

The powerless body of Terumi slanted forward. But still not falling, Terumi stood up with his head hanging. He was like a ghost without a purpose.

Confirming it, Nine frowned in her contempt. As he was detestable to look at, she turned her back.

As the wooden door that had been closed was opened, Jubei and Valkenhayn who were waiting outside instantly put themselves on guard.

"Did it go smoothly?"

Jubei asked.

Jerking her chin, Nine urged their eyes to look past her.

Beyond her was the figure of a tall young man standing dazed in the dim room. That was Nine's answer.

"I've obtained Yuuki Terumi. We no longer have business here."

Nine started walking away.

Jubei gave a tug to stop her.

"Is it really okay? Perhaps we're gettin' our hands on somethin' bad that we shouldn't get involved with."

"I've told you already. Power is essential for us. Unless that monster... Black Beast is annihilated at all costs, there won't be a

future for the world."

For Nine, rather than a mission, it was more of a promise.

In order to fulfill the promise, this man's strength was needed.

"Regret is inevitable."

Cutting it off by saying it with all her determination, the high heels' noise resounded as Nine walked back down the long corridor.

As if he was manipulated to be drawn to it, Terumi... the object called Terumi staggeringly went after her.

Following next was Jubei.

Last, it was Valkenhayn.

"Will this do... Clavis-sama?"

When he was about to leave, Valkenhayn turned around at the empty room with a stern expression. He deeply bowed his head to the previous head of the family who had just died.

It was an event which happened on the cold January of 2107 AD.

Chapter 1: Island of Green Wisdom

Part 1

...This is a dream.

He was aware of it since he was inside a scene he had never seen before.

That place appeared to be an absurdly high place. With the wind blowing fiercely, he stood on a stage-like circular place.

There were no other surroundings. The only thing there was a black monolith which was so enormous that just looking up at it wouldn't be enough to see it fully. The monolith had blue veins that were like blood vessels and a crest shown on its surface. The object stood still without saying anything.

No, there was one more. Another person to be exact.

He didn't know how long the person had stood there, but a young man stood, staring this way.

The strong winds disturbed the young man's white hair and red jacket, ravaging them.

A large and broad sword was gripped in the hands of white-haired young man. His red and green eyes were glaring this way with a sharp glint.

What were shown in his gaze were rage and hatred.

"I'll beat you to death!"

A thrown roar of anger.

The overflowing killing intent was thrusted without any hesitation. He was really... really glad that he saw it in a dream.

The 'him' inside the dream laughed.

"Ooh, oooh. You're finally in the mood!"

As his lips moved on their own, he flung a brutal mockery at the white-haired young man.

He understood. The young man before his eyes couldn't possibly compete with him. But even so, the pitiful cry of the puppy that could only dream of opposing him felt so, so pleasurable to hear.

"C'mon, lil' doggie! Get here so I can play with you!"

As if sliding, he spun the two knives on his hands at the same time and made clicking sounds.

Roaring with all his might, the white-haired young man ran in a straight line. The large sword gripped in his hands made a noise as it tore through the wind.

Dangerous——that was the thought of he who was watching the dream.

Simultaneously, the 'him' inside the dream let a high-pitched laugh out while feeling excitement and joy.

"Hey hey, what's wrong?! Hyaahahahaha!"

He didn't know 'who' was laughing.

Was it he who felt scared of the white-haired young man's expression? Or was it he who mocked that expression since it was laughable?

No, was it himself? Was it 'him'? Who was it?

From the bottom of the stomach, from inside the head, from an even deeper place. Something was swelling and breaking out. More and more. Along with the snake heads from the chain, a greedy

hunger went to bite the young man.

"_____!!"

The red and green pupils glared. They shouted the name of 'someone'.

Clad in the flame of darkness, the large sword swung. A pitch black arm was stretching. It was just like a lump of hatred.

"YES. HATE ME MORE. MORE,
MOREMOREMOREMOREMOOOOOORE!"

An inner voice was screaming in pleasure. No, it was 'his' voice. No, it was my voice. I don't know anymore. Since when was it me and since when was it not me? Since when was it a dream and since when was it not a dream?

I don't know. I don't know. Only greed grew larger, exploding from inside.

Scary. That's what I thought. The weak me just before I vanish.

With only his feeling, he seemed to be pulling himself out of the dream's scene, desperately closing his eyes.

Wake up. Quickly wake up. This is a dream. It's only a dream...

As his body was shivering with a sudden feeling of falling, the young man who had been sleeping until now woke up with a powerful jump.

His cheeks felt the warm light of day.

It was a peaceful morning.

From the square window near the bed, the thin sunlight was

crowded between the curtains that weren't fully closed, as if pushing them aside.

Below his body was a simple bed. The firm drawers of a desk used to study. A built-in closet. A certainly mass produced rag was laid on the floor.

Nothing's changed. It was the usual room, the usual morning.

His thought slowly starting to wake up from a dream to reality. Although he was in his own room, unconsciously catching his breath, the young man——Kazuma suddenly took a breath.

"It's a dream..."

He dropped his stiff shoulders and wiped his forehead. Covered with unpleasant sweat droplets, the palm of his hands became wet.

His shoulder width was narrow. If someone had to say, he was a young man with a delicate body. With a pale skin that hardly got sunburn, he couldn't be regarded as strong by any standard. Rather than such words like sword and gun, or sport and stadium, he was more suited to words like book and library.

He, Kazuma Kuvaru, was a person with such appearance.

"Even so, it was a strange dream..."

Scratching his hair which was long enough to cover his eyes, Kazuma complained to no one.

No, was that really a dream?

A place which was so high that clouds were floating nearby. A circular stage. A standing-still black monument... A white-haired man.

On the contrary, the 'him' in the dream absolutely didn't feel like himself. It was like he was reliving someone else's memory.

(But whose... Wait, who was it?)

He didn't have any idea. In the first place, even if it was based on his memory, Kazuma didn't have the knowledge that was needed.

Kazuma's memory had begun at the morning of a day seven years ago. He woke above thi same bed that morning. That was the beginning of his memory.

He couldn't remember a single thing prior to that. How long had he lived here? Where was he born? What kind of past did he have? He didn't know anything.

He only knew a little bit about himself.

He didn't know what kind of human relation he had with him, but under the guardianship of a man called Relius Clover, he was now attending the academy he enrolled in. The financial aid was all that man's doing. And then during these seven years, he became aware of his preferences and nature, also his strong and weak points.

The kind of information that formed him was those things.

He didn't know about the roots he was born in, especially the prospect beyond this point.

Every day, he only spent time without a purpose. Sometimes, Kazuma thought that he was just like a dandelion seed that could do nothing but drift on the wind.

"...Hey, it's not the time to daze around. I'll be late if I don't quickly get ready."

The things he couldn't remember were just a normal thing. He had grown used to it. Rather than worrying over it, Kazuma fixed his hair, which had been disordered by sleeping, while getting down from the bed.

He opened the room's curtains which were half closed.

As the morning sun flooded into the room, he saw a city spread out as if it was a painting.

White walls with green and blue roofs. The extending roads which

had many irregular turns that became stone pavements. The roadside trees, which were cultivated to grow large, were full with deep green leaves.

He started living on this island seven years ago while not knowing anything. This city was the only world for Kazuma.

The rich nature. Buildings with beautiful exteriors. It couldn't be seen from here, but there was ocean on the opposite side that sparkled as it was bathed in the light of day.

This place was an island floating on the ocean, *Ishana*. But outside the island, only a few referred it with that name. Most knew it as *the Mages' Guild*.

Part 2

Ishana, also known as the Mages' Guild, was a particular institution that didn't belong to any nation.

In this age when science and technology were being developed, this institution was the only one that specialized in magic and alchemy. For that very reason, there was no activity that made them stood out globally. But behind the scenes, they had connections with many nations, establishing a self-government that was neutral and completely independent from other countries.

A powerful barrier created by magic was spread around the whole island. It repelled any kind of slight interference from the outside. Furthermore as invasion from the outside was certain, a strict check would be performed when leaving from inside the island.

Therefore, Ishana was said to be the safest city in the world.

Of course, there were all kinds of facilities in the island that provided the minimum needs. As the island community grew, so did residences and companies, as well as vigilance committees and judicial systems in place.

Above all those significant facilities, it was an educational institution.

There was a magnificent academy located on the center of the island. Under the control and management of the Mages' Guild, it taught magic and alchemy in addition to basic education.

Hidden behind the history where machinery and science continued to evolve, sorcery and alchemy had been constantly handed down while concealing their presence. Passing down that vast knowledge and skills to the next generation was the biggest purpose of the academy.

There were dormitories in the academy. Living in dormitory was a requirement, with the exception of the students who lived in the island with their families.

Whatever the form, the students who had determined to live on the island commuted to the academy every day to make an effort to study and practice magic.

Kazuma was also one of the students at the academy.

But unfortunately, Kazuma didn’t know why he attended this particular academy. Did he wish for it? Did his supposed guardian enlist him?

When his memories began, Kazuma had been registered as a student of the academy. The dormitory room where he should be living in had been arranged, his school life began after a week as if it was natural.

And while he was dumbfounded, no less than seven years of time had passed.

He was already used to the academy's uniform which consisted of white tunic, black trousers, and short mantle which seemed to have the image of a magician.

(With random students like me able to wander around, the management here is surprisingly lenient.)

During the recess between classes, leaning against a window on the corridor that was wide open while looking outside, Kazuma complained when he thought about it.

He wondered if he shouldn't be thinking about trivial things like the lenient management.

Maybe it would be different if Kazuma were a popular and excellent student. Unfortunately, his grades were so-so. They were amazingly average.

In any case, he was grateful to be placed in this spot. It was because other people didn't have any expectation toward Kazuma.

(Memory... huh.)

Looking up at the clear sky, his mind faintly muttered.

Just like now, he sometimes wondered about it when he wasn't doing anything.

...He had forgotten something really important.

Of course, since he couldn't remember anything of his past, it should be obvious. However, he had a feeling like that there was something special, something that he must not forget. And it had to be remembered no matter what.

He had a feeling like that.

But... if felt a little scary.

What would become of him if he remembered the 'something that had to be remembered no matter what'? If the memory he desperately tried to remember would overturn the foundation of his current self, in that case, it would be worth nothing

When that time came, what would be the best thing for him to do? In the first place, what would become of his current self when he regained his memories? Could he keep on being here as if there was no difference?

"...Well, it's not like it'll happen to me though."

Kazuma let out a small sigh as he spoke to himself.

Thinking about futile things made his head feel unpleasant. Giving up on thinking about it, he once again looked outside.

With only a few clouds on the sky, the soft sunlight was shining down. The weather was nice today.

Regardless, Ishana always had fine weather.

Having a mild climate, the spring was warm enough to wake up and still be half-asleep at the same time. The autumn was fairly cold. No day hot enough to sweat, no day cold enough to be freezing.

There wouldn't be war if there was no hunger. There was never any sort of a natural disaster here.

The days in Ishana were really peaceful.

That was why Kazuma sometimes forgot.

Taking a step ahead outside the island, the whole world, with the exception of this island, was approaching the crisis of destruction.

Today was 2106 AD.

It started six years ago, 2100 AD, January 1st.

In Japan, an island nation located in the Far East, an unidentified monster appeared suddenly.

With an appearance like a snake that had numerous heads, the black monster was gigantic. Only, it had an instinct to lay destruction and massacre indiscriminately.

Furthermore, in the same time as the appearance of the monster, a substance called seithr began to overflow everywhere.

In exchange for neutralizing any harmful substance, as if it was a touch of a living being, the seithr sensed the existence of humans and informed the monster. Then, it occasionally became a guide and a lane, summoning the monster.

Following the seithr, the black monster would appear in unexpected places and at unexpected moments. When all that lived there weren't quick enough to get away, it would easily destroy everything entirely.

Using nuclear weapons, humanity tried to annihilate the monster by striking the unfortunate country called Japan. But the result ended with failure.

On the contrary, judging by the fact that the destructive being was

no longer in Japan, the jet-black apparition bared its fangs toward the whole world.

——The Black Beast.

Facing the apparition which was referred to as that, humanity had tried every means they had.

But nothing was proven to be an effective method... Before anyone realized it, people could do nothing but struggle to escape from Black Beast again and again.

In this very moment, some part of the world might be facing destruction because of the Black Beast.

Despite that, there were lush green parks, roadside trees, and variously colored flowers blooming in Ishana where Kazuma lived.

For the Black Beast to be in this island, it would be like an illusion as if it was a nightmare.

"...Hm?"

Kazuma, who had been dazing with his arms placed on the window frame, suddenly took notice of a part of the scenery.

The academy's courtyard could be seen from the windows on the corridor. Naturally, the courtyard had school buildings and an auditorium which the students used there. There were many Mages' Guild's facilities constructed there.

Among those, there was a single pure white building which was called the Cathedral. Several people were busily going in and out of it.

The Cathedral was the most sacred place among the Mages' Guild. It wasn't only used by the Guild's people to hold important meetings or when there was a ceremony. With the exception of when there was a special class for the academy's students, it was prohibited to trespass without reason.

Judging by the robes they wore, the people who were going in and

out seemed to be the Mages' Guild's officials. If it was only that, it shouldn't be unusual. However, there was a single person wearing a big, triangular hat on their head.

The hat, noticeable from distance, held a special meaning for the Mages' Guild.

"Ten Sages..."

The Ten Sages were the directors among directors who possessed top-class authority within the Mages' Guild. So to say, someone who had been chosen, a privileged class.

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that they were the one who presently set the Mages' Guild in motion. No one would be permitted to approach the Mages' Guild's most highly classified information that was seemingly stored in the deepest part of the Cathedral if they were not one of the Ten Sages.

Kazuma watched the movements of the Sage who was giving instruction to the restless subordinates. The mark of the chosen one on the big hat moved right and left.

(Come to think of it, it's said that there's a canonization ceremony for a new Ten Sage today.)

It was a very rare occasion.

Ten Sage was a privileged class. Therefore, to be appointed, one must have an authority over the fitting knowledge and experiences, a degree of contribution toward the Mages' Guild, and most of all, the required strength of magic. Hence why, since the Ten Sages were introduced, the number of Sages had been less than ten people for a long time.

The Ten Sage this time seemed to be an active student.

In addition to the rare appointment of a Ten Sage, it was unprecedented for a student to take up a post there.

With that 'unprecedented' coming from his classmates, it drew a somewhat interest even from Kazuma who normally just spent his

days lazing around.

(If I'm not mistaken... it was Konoe Mercury)

She was undisputedly a super excellent student who had been hailed as a prodigy ever since she came to the Mages' Guild. Because of her gorgeous appearance, in addition known to have a very up-tight personality, she was a very well-known person in Ishana for various reasons.

Having no such grades, and also plain appearance and personality, Kazuma was the polar opposite of her.

(In this world, there are people who walk a bright path of life.)

Feeling discouraged, he let out a sigh. It was a world which didn't have much relation with Kazuma.

It was no use looking at it continuously as if he was being jealous of his neighbor's green lawn. As the class would begin soon, Kazuma went away from the window. Granted, there was hardly any jealous feeling left toward the Ten Sages position.

At that moment, suddenly.

————.

A voice was heard.

Kazuma looked back.

But unsurprisingly, there was only an opened window. There was no figure of a person.

"...Huh?"

He felt that he had certainly heard someone's voice just now. At any rate, he had a feeling that he had surely been called.

"I don't like this... Hallucinating after having a memory loss. It seems I can no longer laugh it off."

While scratching his head as if he was disturbing his hair, Kazuma turned his back on the window once more.

The timing was just right as the bell that informed the start of the next class echoed throughout the corridor. Kazuma reflexively looked up at the ceiling and trotted back to the classroom.

Part 3

The circular hall made of white stone was enveloped in solemn atmosphere.

The ceiling was high and shaped like a hemisphere. The walls which were in perfect circle had several thick pillars nestled close together. Some statue-like objects silently lined up at regular intervals.

Between the pillars, crystals as big as human head were floating. Since they were charged with the power of magic, like floating on the surface of water, they were flickering up and down while shining in pale white.

Surrounded by some divine light, several figures who were wearing dignified robes and large triangular hats stood in a circular pattern.

The number of people was less than ten.

They uniformly turned their sights to the center. At the end of it, one girl was kneeling. With long mantle spread on the floor and long hair down her back which slipped from her shoulders, she hung her head as if giving a prayer.

From the circle, a single robed figure stepped forward and stood in front of the girl.

"Konoe Mercury. I hereby appoint you as a Ten Sage, he who possesses great wisdom... You are now called 'Nine'."

The one who announced it with a stern voice was a sturdy and massive elderly man.

The girl... Konoe. No, Nine. She answered with her knees still down on the cold floor.

"I humbly accept it."

A different robed figure drew close. First, he walked up to the elderly man before passing a purple hat. A large triangular hat, like what a witch who appeared in fairy tale would wear.

It was the proof of the chosen one, a Ten Sage.

The symbol of great magical and alchemical knowledge was placed on Nine's head.

"Now, from this very moment, a new wisdom has joined the Ten Sages. According to the sacred order, that intelligence will last for eons."

With the majestic declaration, several other attendees repeated the same phrases. A great number of voices blended, reverberated on the tall ceiling.

The position of Ten Sage was bestowed only to the most prominent magicians in Mage’s Guild. With her head remain hung, Nine indifferently listened to the end of the canonization alone.

When Nine came out from the Cathedral, it was already the last half of the noon recess.

The Ten Sage canonization was held deep underground in the Cathedral, a special room that was forbidden to enter for anyone other than a Ten Sage. It was probably because she had been looking down in the windowless room for a long time that she thought that it had been a long time since she felt the refreshing outside air when the wind profusely stirred.

Around the Cathedral was a courtyard within the academy. With the exception of the path that was covered in stone tiles, there were carefully trimmed shrubs and trees enveloping the lush lawn. They

stood side-by-side as if it was a natural park.

Within such peaceful spectacle, Nine walked toward the school building. Her long, straight hair which covered her back was gracefully fluttering as the wind blew through it.

The other Ten Sages were still inside the Cathedral. With nobody else around, a refreshing serenity was drifting in the air.

Suddenly, there were light footsteps running which broke the silence. From the opposite side of the gently curved path, two figures that Nine knew well appeared.

"Onee-chaaaan!"

The girl, who had deep brown hair tied in a high ponytail, furiously waved her hand while calling Nine in a lively voice.

Behind her, there was another girl wearing a big round spectacles. Barely keeping pace with the first girl, while approaching Nine. Her fluffy platinum blonde hair was beautiful. As if restraining it, she wore the hood of her robe.

Just as she fixed her eyes on the two figures, Nine's expression that had looked mildly amused began to become cheerful.

"Celica! Trinity!"

Straining her soft-colored eyes, Nine also faced both of them and waved her hand.

The first girl, her ponytail whipping forward as she abruptly stopped in front of Nine, was Celica A. Mercury. She was Nine's younger sister.

Behind her, the bespectacled girl, who was out of breath after shaving caught up with Celica, was called Trinity Glassfille. She was Nine's one and only friend.

Celica's eyes which had deep color that resembled wet soil were sparkling. Somewhat excited, she opened her mouth.

"Is it over, Onee-chan? The Ten Sage's canonization, that is!"

"It's over. Although it's a canonization ceremony, I'm just following the old procedure. It's not like I'm doing anything special."

"But still, about that."

Toward the innocently excited Celica, Nine let out a wry smile. While watching the lovable scene of them both, Trinity spoke softly.

"Didn't you receive that peculiar hat~?"

Trinity spoke with a carefree and slow tone of voice. Nine moved her gaze up to look at the top her head. As one would expect, she wasn't able to look at it completely without a mirror, but she could clearly see the unnecessarily wide circular brim.

"The hat's just an ornament."

She uninterestedly snorted.

"Besides, for me to be a Ten Sage seriously bothers me. Actually, rather than me, Trinity is more fitting for it."

"Oh my... You speak of such thing again~."

Looking at her friend's unusual expression that was like a sulking child, Trinity smiled bitterly with her brows down. Just the other day, Nine had spoken the same thing when it was decided that she had been appointed as a Ten Sage.

If Nine was excellent at handling magic, then Trinity was a prodigy in sensing and analyzing magic information in an instant. She also excelled at alchemy. Taken from Trinity's beautiful hair, she was given the nickname of The Platinum Alchemist
Platinum the Trinity
. She was that well known and admired.

Natural talent aside, Nine considered that Trinity's profound wisdom which supported her capability was an ability that really should have been evaluated.

Toward Nine who got displeased again, Trinity laughed in a soft voice that truly matched her meek appearance.

"That hat suits you well~."

"...Thanks."

With a troubled smile on her face, Nine shrugged her shoulders as if she was hiding her embarrassment.

Toward the usual and ordinary Nine who had the symbol of greatest honor crowned on her head, Trinity straightened herself while putting her modest respect.

"From now on, I guess we should call you Nine."

"Nine?"

Slightly inclining her head, Celica asked in her curiosity.

After Nine exchanged glance with Trinity again, she answered with a wry smile.

"A term for the person joining the Sages... Simply put, it's a particular name that's given to imply that someone is a Ten Sage. Since I'm the ninth, then it's Nine. Although it's only a formality, I'm glad that I don't need to spare any time changing my name anymore."

Since Nine was frank when she spoke, it was Trinity who smiled wryly this time.

Nine's real name was Konoe. Konoe Mercury.

However, Nine wasn't fond of her name. Trinity and Celica knew well the reason. It was because the person who gave the name was Nine and Celica's father.

Nine despised her father. Even that was pushing it. She disliked it when Celica brought up her father.

But six years ago, it had become unknown whether her father was

actually alive or dead.

"I see... Since it's been decided, I guess there's no helping it."

Downhearted, Celica pulled her chin.

Nine might loathe the name Konoe, but for Celica, it was an important name of her important sister. Although it was the rule, it was a little sad for her sister's name to get changed.

"But... Although you're the 'Nine of the Ten Sages', Onee-chan is still my big sis... right?'"

Pulling her chin with upturned eyes, Celica looked up at the sister who was taller than her, as if she was peeking.

Looking at the honest eyes which showed courtesy, as if flinching, Nine gasped in a somewhat comical movement.

And then, as she could bear it no longer, she hugged Celica close to her voluptuous bosoms with terrifying strength.

"Of course I am, Celica～～～～! Whatever the position, whatever the name, I'm still your big sister! Aah～, don't make that face. There might be an insolent bastard hiding somewhere trying to ruin that adorable and helpless face of yours!"

"O-Onee-cha... It hurts..."

Having her face crushed in the soft chest, Celica struggled. Regulating her breath after she somehow got her face released, Celica raised her eyes to Nine while still being hugged.

"That's right. Onee-chan, you still haven't had a lunch, have you? Let's eat together. I was waiting for you."

"Eh? You what? You still haven't eaten yet? I thought I told you to eat before."

Nine looked bewildered as she spoke, Celica gave a spoiled smile.

"It's because I wanted to celebrate."

"Celebrate? What for?"

"Of course to congratulate Onee-chan for becoming a Sage. Hmph, this is a special occasion, but you're still completely the same as usual."

Celica pouted.

Beside them, Trinity giggled. It was like she was watching kittens playing together.

"Come on now, we should go. If we keep chatting here, the noon recess will be over in a flash~. Right, Celica-san? Nine?"

"Wah! That'll be bad!"

Flustered, Celica slipped out of Nine's embrace. Reversing the position, this time she grabbed her sister's arm. With a cheerful voice, she gave a happy smile to her sister.

"Let's go, Onee-chan. I'll treat you to the cafeteria's pudding as a celebration!"

"Pudding...? I'm not a kid, you know."

Even if she was reluctant while saying that, Nine started walking to follow Celica.

She had always known about it, but she truly had nice younger sister and best friend.

Slightly fixing the large hat placed on her head while secretly smiling, Nine, sandwiched between her sister and best friend, left the courtyard.

Part 4

The school cafeteria in the Mages' Guild's academy. Although it didn't have the capacity to accommodate the whole student body, it was a wide open place that could manage the majority of them.

From the large windows, the scenery of courtyard and soft sunshine came into eyes without restraint. Since today was such a clear day, one would briefly forget that this place was part of a school.

With plenty of variety in the menu and even an installed television which was broadcasting news, every day, the place would be filled with a great number of students during the noon recess.

Kazuma was also one of the students who liked to go to this cafeteria. Occupying alone the table close to the wall which was a bit separated from the crowd, he was about to finish eating the daily special Lunch C.

During the days when he had classes, Kazuma's lunch would always be this menu. There were two reasons. First, it was bothersome to think about what to order for every single thing. The other one... a hard-boiled egg was include in the special lunch C.

Kazuma by no means was a gourmet. He was also not particularly strict in his diet.

However, it's just that the hard-boiled egg was special.

Looks, taste, simplicity. There was nothing to complain about any of them. There was salad and a hot sandwich placed in the plate, but the hard-boiled egg was the true main course for Kazuma.

"Well then..."

He had already finished eating the cuisine which had filled his plate, with the exception of the hard-boiled egg he had saved for last.

First things first was to taste the black tea and immediately put it back. Next was to take the smooth texture of that object into his hands.

To ensure its contents would not become damaged, he gently hit it on the table's edge several times. As the white shell started to get numerous cracks, he carefully peeled it with his thumbs.

And finally after the bouncy hard-boiled egg appeared, Kazuma, quite satisfied, raised it to his mouth.

"Beautiful..."

It was an undoubtedly a perfect shape.

There was nothing special to it and Kazuma didn't have any goal in doing this. Every day, this precise time probably was the time he looked forward the most.

Picking up the salt that was provided for the table, Kazuma lightly

sprinkled it to the smooth white skin of the egg. First, he would get a mouthful... and so as he thought. It was during that moment.

"Why, if it isn't Kazuma-san."

"Ah...?"

Toward the voice, which came from out of nowhere, Kazuma turned his head with his mouth half-opened.

Standing there was a platinum blonde girl wearing round eye-glasses. The gentle atmosphere wasn't overflowing from the voice only, but also from her whole body.

Kazuma recognized the girl who had cream sauce pasta in her tray.

"Oh my, Trinity-san. Having lunch now?"

"Yes. I had a little errand today."

She was a female student from the same class as him. For the uniform, beside the mantle, you could choose any robe. Although she was often wearing the latter, she usually put on the hood as if to hold down her soft hair.

Like a child wondering if she was a witch coming out from a fairy-tale, Kazuma believed that he frequently saw her.

There were two other people stood behind Trinity. A beautiful female classmate with her long hair flowing over her back and a short girl with her hair bundled up at a high position.

Kazuma also knew about the beautiful girl. She was his classmate just like Trinity.

Her name was Konoe Mercury. Presently, she wasn't a stranger among the academy. She was a rare prodigy who got selected as a Ten Sage even when she was a student.

But the other pony-tailed girl was a new face. The girl's face peeked from behind Trinity.

"Hm? A friend of Trinity-san? Good afternoon."

Her huge eyes looked straight at Kazuma without reservation. Their gaze met.

That moment, the chill he had vaguely felt until now suddenly intensified. His hair stood on its end.

He didn't know the cause. For some reason, he could not return the gaze of the pupils which were facing him. Kazuma averted his eyes as if he had succumbed to her strength.

"Aah, err. Hello."

He barely answered with a faint voice.

Suspicious at that, Konoe Mercury glanced.

"Who's this? Your acquaintance?"

Since she flung the remark over her shoulder, Trinity's face became troubled.

"What do you mean by who? He's Kazuma Kuvaru. Isn't he in the same class as you, Kono... Nine?"

"He's in our class? I didn't know."

"O-Onee-chan, just how impolite you are!? I'm sorry, Kazuma-san. Onee-chan's bad at remembering people's names..."

As she placed the plate containing spaghetti bolognese, the ponytailed girl proficiently bowed her head.

Taking a few seconds to be aware of the gesture which was addressed at him, Kazuma, late in coming to his senses, hurriedly shook his head. This situation of having three different types of girls standing while looking at him was completely overwhelming.

"N-no... Don't worry about it."

After Kazuma replied, the face of the pony-tailed girl suddenly

turned into a smile. The very picture of carefree and innocent of an expression made Kazuma astonished again.

At the same time, he felt another indescribable discomfort accompanied with chills that ran through his spine.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Celica A. Mercury. You're Onee-chan's classmate, right? Thanks for always taking care of my sister."

A voice like the sound of a blooming flower. The tone of voice and expression had to be the characteristic of this girl called Celica.

Rather than envy... he felt a little dislike. Particularly to this girl.

"He didn't take care of me. We've never spoken after all. I didn't even notice his presence."

"Ha, haha..."

As for the point given by Konoe Mercury, who he supposed must be Celica's sister, it felt mercilessly cold. Kazuma's stiff mouth laughed. Even though there was several times when they had exchanged words, it seemed they were completely erased from her memory.

"Um... That hat."

When Kazuma took notice of the hat which was placed on the beautiful girl's head, he reflexively let his voice out.

A big, triangular purple hat which had a wide brim. Kazuma understood well its meaning.

"It's the canonization ceremony, right? Congratulations for being a Ten Sage, Konoe Mercury-san."

After he put the egg aside, Kazuma made a gentlemanly smile as much as he could.

But the beautiful woman wearing the triangular hat glared at Kazuma with an intense look. With a tone of voice that sounded too arrogant, she spoke clearly.

"It's Nine."

"Yes?"

"My name. I don't have the tiny bit of desire to be addressed by you, but call me Nine if you're going to address me again."

"Aah... Nine, is it."

When someone became a Ten Sage, a name following the number of one to ten was given. From that time, that person would be referred with the number. Kazuma remembered the rule now.

But somehow, the name Nine was something more than just a rule for her. She was someone that shouldn't be made angry by such an inadvertent mistake. Kazuma decided to firmly imprint the new name of his classmate into his brain.

"Ah, that's right."

Celica suddenly came up with something and then opened her mouth.

"Kazuma-san. If you don't mind, can we have lunch together?"

"Yes... Eh, what?"

After he reflexively answered, he spontaneously asked again. He really couldn't comprehend what she had spoken of. Celica on the other hand had an expression as if she had an idea she found splendid.

"I was thinking to do a celebration for Onee-chan today. But... since we're sort of coming late, there's no more empty seats."

"Aaah, I see."

Now that she mentioned it, all the tables in the cafeteria had certainly been filled. Not so many people came to the cafeteria at this time of day, but nevertheless, it was surprisingly crowded today.

Celica, shrugging her shoulders, let out a childish smile.

"Besides, I don't often get the chance to meet one of Onee-chan's friends that isn't Trinity-san. I want to talk with Kazuma-san more."

"With me? But..."

Even with the smile that was like baiting him, the reluctant Kazuma spoke ambiguously.

For some reason, he didn't want to get too close to this girl named Celica.

In the first place, Kazuma didn't know a lot about Nine. He didn't know what Celica was expecting, but there was nothing worth mentioning to talk about.

It seemed Nine also didn’t want to share a table with Kazuma.

When his eyes fled from Celica's gaze to look forward, sure enough, Konoe... Nine observed Kazuma with her eyebrows furrowed in discontent.

Kazuma spontaneously averted his eyes. Konoe Mercury. Nine. Whichever her name was, he didn't want to have her keep an eye on him too much.

However, that wish was far from being realized.

"Celica-san, you mustn't ask such unreasonable request. He seems to have already finished his lunch~."

"Eeh, so it's no good? I wanted to get along... Too bad."

Lectured by Trinity to take consideration, Celica dropped her small shoulders.

Seeing such a state, how could he turn her down?

For quite a while, his body felt a strange bad feeling. But it might be just his imagination.

"...Umm, I don't mind. There are enough empty seats for exactly another three people."

"Go ahead," said Kazuma as he smiled gently. The smile by no means showed his true feelings. It was more like a habit that would come out when he faced other people.

But Celica received the impression of the smile she saw. A smile from the bottom of her heart, which was different than Kazuma's, bloomed all over her expression.

"Really!? Hooray! Thank you, Kazuma-san. Ah, then I'll go buy another congratulatory pudding. It's my thanks for listening to my selfishness!"

No sooner after she talked, Celica put the tray containing her lunch on the seat in front of Kazuma and ran off with her long hair leaped.

"Eh, ah. No, I'm..."

There wasn't any opportunity to stop her.

Like clockwork, Celica had gone to the cafeteria's counter vigorously.

As Kazuma was overcame with surprise watching it, Trinity's tray was placed on the seat next to him.

"My apologies, Kazuma-san. But thanks for helping us out~."

"Good grief... She never listens when she starts talking."

Although she seemed a bit sullen, Nine still reluctantly placed her lunch at the table while also taking a seat.

He looked at Trinity's tray and also Nine's, small custard puddings were sat there.

(I see. So this is the congratulatory gift.)

Most likely, it was that child Celica who suggested it.

As he glanced, a long ponytail swayed left and right as she headed this way. In her hands, Celica was holding a similar pudding to the one on her tray.

Kazuma somehow felt like giving up.

It looked like it was going to be a long lunch.

Part 5

A fork was winding around above a plate, intertwining bolognese sauce and spaghetti.

While carrying it to her mouth, Celica casually stared directly at Kazuma who was sitting in front of her.

"So, Kazuma-san also doesn't talk much except with Trinity-san?"

The topic surrounding the lunch was about the relationships within Kazuma's classroom.

Kazuma, having already finished eating the hardboiled egg, was now somewhat poking the pudding he received from Celica. The table might now look distinctly showy compared to his usual, but still, the hardboiled egg had tasted so wonderfully delicious.

"Hey, Celica. What do you mean by 'also'? That guy and me aren't in the same level."

The first one to open her mouth at Celica's words was Nine. Dissatisfaction was clearly mixed in her explicit tone which had been going on until now.

But not minding her sister's complaint, Celica instead gave her a straight answer.

"But Onee-chan, if Trinity-san weren't here, wouldn't you only have me as a partner to eat a meal with? When you went for a vacation, it was with just Trinity-san and me."

"...It's meaningless to associate myself with people whose level is far from mine."

"See, you said it again. That's why you're considered as a scary

person."

As the sisters began quarreling all of a sudden, Kazuma was dumbfounded while grasping the pudding spoon tightly.

No one had ever thought that there existed a person who could speak so bluntly to the talented Nine who was feared because of her tight personality. On the contrary, Nine was overwhelmed. It was hard to believe that the sudden spectacle could happen to the exceptional prodigy who was enrolled in the same class as him.

But different from Kazuma, Trinity, who seemed to be used to seeing it, nonchalantly proceeded to eat, smiling as she watched the sisters.

Celica once again got her sight back to Kazuma.

"Ah. I'm sorry, Kazuma-san. Please continue with your story."

"Even if I continue... As you say, I also speak on daily basis with just Trinity-san."

"'Also'?"

From diagonally in front of him, Nine's sharp voice came.

"Ah, no..."

Kazuma quickly closed his mouth with his hand.

Beside him, Trinity laughed a little.

"Hey. Why are you laughing, Trinity?"

"Fufu... So-sorry, Nine. I don't mean anything bad."

"I'm not asking about that. Good grief."

Pouting, Nine folded her arms beneath her plump chest after she brushed her hair.

Kazuma tried to keep showing a smile while scratching his cheek. Since he wasn't used to being involved in a setting like this, he was

actually troubled. Easily creating such awkward atmosphere seemed like one of the strong points of women.

Setting aside the peevish opinion, Kazuma hesitantly opened his mouth.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean Nine-san and I have the same level... I was trying to say that Trinity-san is a nice person since she greeted me even though I'm low profile."

"Oh. But Kazuma-san isn't low profile."

"No, no, that's not true. It's unthinkable."

Even when Kazuma seemed to be giving in, he raised both of his hand at the height of his chest and shook his head to Trinity as she tried to dismiss it.

Seeing that, this time it was Celica who laughed. She curiously let out a girlish laugh, or rather the tone of someone who laughed delightfully.

"Kazuma-san is an interesting person. At first, I thought you aren't that good at chatting. But I learned that you have lots to speak about. I'm somewhat happy."

"Oh... is that so?"

"Umm. Can I talk to you more often from now on? I want to know more about Kazuma-san."

"Eeh!? Err, that's..."

Couldn't answer her right away, Kazuma's eyes wandered as he panicked.

He didn't look back at Celica's eyes that staring directly at him.

Someone who hated this girl called Celica must be rare. Somehow, even if someone was overwhelmed by her nonstop vigor, his heart would quickly be snatched by the honest good will and that adorable laughter. At times, Celica's behavior was similar to the

innocence of puppy or kitten.

However, Kazuma for some reason wasn't fond of Celica. He didn't know why... Looking at her eyes gave him trouble breathing. It made his chest felt tight.

(She shouldn't be a bad girl though...)

While Kazuma was still trying to decide his answer, Nine stood up as if interrupting his thought. The chair which was pushed roughly made one think that she wasn't composed no matter how optimistic a person was when he looked at it.

"Celica. Come here for a second."

"Huh?"

As Celica was about to finish the spaghetti bolognese, her arm was pulled as Nine left the table. Celica followed her sister while still wide-eyed.

The girls stopped at the sandwich and bread counter which was always immediately filled with lines of students as soon as the noon recess starts. It was a bit away from the table where Kazuma and Trinity were left behind, but it wasn't a distance where they couldn't see the girls' expressions.

Along with Trinity who was peeling off the pudding's seal, Kazuma watched over at the situation. No sooner after she suddenly looked over her shoulder, Nine spoke.

"Stop getting involved with that suspicious man! It'll only get you into trouble!"

The flowing disapproval came flying to Kazuma's ears. It cleared up the question as to why the she felt she needed to leave the table to talk to Celica.

The powerful tone was enough to make someone cower, but it didn't even make Celica wince.

"Kazuma-san isn't suspicious! He might be a bit of a strange person,

but it's harsh to brand him like that when we don't know him enough!"

"It's not necessary getting to know about him. You should know when you see him. Such a questionable man, whose thought can't be figured from his expression, isn't a decent person."

"That's not true!"

"Anyway, don't get familiar and approach that mysterious guy. You have a cute face and personality, but something crucial is missing. It will make sly and dishonest people take advantage of you."

"What are you saying!? You seem to accuse Kazuma-san of being a sly and dishonest person!"

The eyes of many students who were finishing their lunch gathered on the pair of quarreling sisters. Others began to look towards the table that Kazuma was sitting at, having guessed that he was the Kazuma-san in qustion.

Unable to bear the situation, Kazuma fixed his eyes on his pudding as if turning his eyes from reality.

What was quite shocking was Celica's remark when she completely denied the 'questionable man whose thought can't be figured from his expression' Nine had said.

(...I wonder if I'm that questionable?)

He tried to place his hand somewhere on his stunned face. As the mouth his fingers touched expressed a stiff smile that he was unaware of, he got shocked again.

"Umm, Kazuma-san?"

While the paralyzed Kazuma had his hand on his cheek, a worried voice came from beside him.

With a dry smile and trembling shoulders, Kazuma spoke to himself.

"...From now on, I wonder what kind of face would be good when

facing them..."

"Uh, umm... please don't worry about it too much ~. Nine somewhat loses control when it comes to Celica-san. She will just disregard her surroundings~."

Even Trinity was wearing a bothered smile. She must often given this explanation to others from time to time. Experiences with troubles seeped from how she talked.

"Besides, I like Kazuma-san's politeness and modesty. I think of you as a good-natured person."

"Haha... Thanks for that."

It's more preferable by far than a harsh criticism, but getting praised straight to his face was embarrassing. Kazuma awkwardly loosened up while scratching his mouth.

"Even so, Trinity-san is also a person who burdened with troubles, right? Like with her and me, you associate with people who aren't used to the class."

"Fufu. But compared to Kazuma-san's hardship, it feels pleasant."

"My hardship?"

"Your memory. It hasn't returned, right?"

"Aah..."

Kazuma had memory loss. It was a story that was known among his classmates.

The first time around, it wasn't a common thing. But now he practically didn't know just how many people had learned about it.

Kazuma also didn't wish for the issue to get mentioned too much. Getting inquiries out of curiosity would only bother him. Also, Kazuma usually didn't care about it too much.

However, sometimes Trinity was concerned about Kazuma.

It was by no means troublesome.

Trinity had a sort of enthusiasm where it would be fine to ask 'how are you doing?' to someone who had chronic disease. She made serious sounding words like 'memory loss' sound like something lighthearted.

"Well, it hasn't returned at all. I even think that I might not have a past to remember."

"Oh, please don't say about such a thing."

"Aah, no no. I'm aware of it."

Kazuma gave a loose smile to the rebuking Trinity who had a gloomy expression.

"It's not like I'm pessimistic about it, so don't worry."

Even if he was pessimistic, he didn't know if having nothing to remember was something to be delighted about or to lament with.

Kazuma suddenly realized something and raised his face. Before he had realised it, the sisters' quarrel could no longer be heard.

When he looked at them, both of them were silent while still stood in the same place as before. They stared at the large television which was installed in the cafeteria as if devouring it. Their expressions were too pale to have been drawn to it by interest only.

Following the girls' line of sight, Kazuma also looked toward the television.

Inside the rectangular screen, the usual news program was airing. The newscaster talked on and on while somewhat trembling.

It was a news that arrived from a particular country.

Part 6

"——that. I will report it again. This morning, according to the investigation team of the United Nations who went to Japan, a survivor has been found. For the six years period of time since the nuclear strike on Japan, the survivor took a shelter in the underground and appeared to be living hidden below. Although he is considerably weak, there's nothing serious that might endanger his life. For now, the investigation team will wait for his physical condition to improve before questioning him about the past six years."

Japan.

The country where the Black Beast, the monster that spread terror and anxiety throughout the world by appearing in unexpected places and at unexpected moments, had first appeared. In order to eliminate its threat, nuclear missiles were launched and virtually destroyed the country.

Because of a high concentration of radioactivity and chemical substances, Japan had been contaminated. It had turned into a land of death where no beings could live. But as the pollution steadily lessened, the United Nations dispatched an investigation team half a year ago.

As this time civilians were also able to enter to Japan, investigations which had certain purposes had taken place. But it seemed... the result was that a survivor that had been left behind in Japan for six years was found.

"A survivor... in Japan?"

The screen was a bit distant, but the newscaster's voice was clearly audible. Kazuma breathed out to signal his interest.

But Trinity kept silent with a serious distress of an expression. It seemed Kazuma's murmur didn't reach her ears.

"Trinity Glassfille-san?"

When he questioningly asked, Trinity turned around with a gasping sound trembled on her throat. Her pretty green eyes opened wide. A slight disturbance could be seen there.

"Ah... um, no. It's nothing,"

With a faint smile, Trinity dropped her gaze to the pudding she held in her hand. Most of it was hidden by the hood and hair, but sorrow still spread on her face.

Kazuma moved his gaze.

What Trinity was seeing wasn't the television. It was Nine and Celica.

The sisters had been arguing seriously until a while ago. They got somewhat stunned as they watched the news. Slipping through the students, they returned here. The grim faced Nine urged the dejected Celica to walk.

"C'mon, Celica."

Nine forced the delicate Celica to sit on the chair before she sat down on her own.

Silence fell on the table. The congratulatory pudding seemed gloomy.

No one opened their mouth. Enduring such atmosphere, Kazuma timidly called out to Celica who looked disheartened compared to anyone else.

"Has something happened?"

Although Celica certainly raised her sight, she shook her head without saying anything. The barely expressed smile on her mouth was very unsuitable for the extremely cheerful girl. It really made

Kazuma worried.

"Are you feeling OK? Your face seems..."

Awfully pale.

He was about to say it. The moment his hand somewhat stretched toward Celica, it happened. Terrible chills ran through Kazuma's spine.

(Eh...?)

Delayed for a moment, this time dizziness distorted his vision. In the blink of an eye, his sense of balance went awry. Kazuma held his head using the hand that was intended for Celica.

"Kazuma-san? Are you okay?"

On the contrary, Celica worriedly called out to him. She half rose to her feet, lowering herself down. With her small hand, she touched Kazuma's forehead.

"...!?"

At that moment, Kazuma shook off Celica's hand with all his strength.

A slapping sound echoed. Kazuma knocked over his chair as he stood up.

"Ah... I-I'm... sor..."

Celica was confused and Nine grimaced as she started to get upset. When his sight stopped at the two of them, Kazuma squeezed out his trembled voice to speak.

His words didn't manage to come. Welled up with terrible nausea, Kazuma immediately fell to his knees and went to a sitting posture.

"Kazuma-san!?"

Trinity left her seat in a hurry and leaned over to Kazuma's side.

Celica also became panic as she rushed over to him.

"H-hold on, what's the matter!? Hang in there!"

Kazuma's stiffened eyes looked up at Celica who was crouching before his eyes.

Welling up along with nausea, his chest was filled with... discomfort as if he was being swallowed.

(No... Don't come... Don't... come here.)

The dizziness was mixed up together with words of rejection. My head hurts. I want to throw up.

"Do you feel sick? We must get to the infirma..."

"I... I'm fine."

Kazuma's desperate thought interrupted the words of the worrying Celica. He straightly refused the stretched hand that was going to rub his back.

Forcibly pulling the shivering mouth, he made a smile.

"I'm... all right. I suddenly felt a bit sick... but I'll go to the infirmary on my own."

"But, you shouldn't be alo..."

"Please. I'm okay."

Do not touch me.

As it nearly slipped from his mouth, Kazuma swallowed the spilled words along with saliva.

He didn't know the reason. He didn't understand but... he couldn't help but felt really unpleasant and horrible.

His fist was so tight that its nails were biting the skin. He placed the fist on the wall as he stood up.

At this rate, he must not remain here. He really shouldn't stay here.

"...Sorry. I beg your pardon to go ahead. I'm really okay."

Trying to sound as healthy as he could, Kazuma left the cafeteria as if he was fleeing.

Chapter 2: Cat of Crimson Sunset

Part 1

When the afternoon classes over, the sky on the west side of Ishana started to change color.

The evening on this island unexpectedly went to night in the blink of an eye. In the short interval before the day sunk completely, the sky was dyed in burning color. The city changed color as if enveloped by scarlet veil.

While it was a fantastic and beautiful scenery, at the same time, a vague fear of something beyond human understanding could also be felt from the spectacle.

After school, Kazuma walked toward the dormitory alone, with no friends to accompanying him.

His feet were heavy. Sometimes he staggered. He still hadn't recovered from the sudden illness he got during the end of the noon recess. Even now the light dizziness still lasted. There was still a listless pain inside his head.

Sometime before, Kazuma escaped to the infirmary's bed. But after he gradually calmed down enough, he rejoined during the middle of the afternoon class.

He told the worrying Trinity that there was nothing to be concerned about anymore. But the truth wasn't like that.

While casting his eyes down as if avoiding the strong setting sun, Kazuma put his hand on his heavy head.

"Uuh... I don't feel good..."

His bitter throat groaned.

Previously, he'd had times when headaches and dizziness had tortured him every now and then. Mostly, it occurred when he tried hard to remember the past he had forgotten.

(Still, what happened during the noon recess wasn't like that...)

With his eyebrows furrowed, Kazuma unsteadily made his way home.

The abnormal discomfort during that time wasn't the same as the usual dizziness. It felt like an invisible hand crawled up from inside his body, grasped his head, and started forcefully dragging it down.

Even remembering it now made him well up with nausea.

"Just what exactly is happening..."

That time, he sensed that his condition became awful just as Celica tried to touch him. But such an absurd thing shouldn't be possible. It's a different story if Celica had some sort of extremely troubling special ability that made anyone she touched ill.

(...I wonder if she took offense at it.)

He had unintentionally shaken off Celica's hands. No, Kazuma himself didn't remember if the reactions could be described with those simple words.

It seemed to have made Trinity surprised. As for Nine, he probably had entered her kill list. ...If possible, he wanted to avoid that.

"Hurk..."

It's no good. He still didn't feel well.

At this rate, going with the usual path would bathe his front with the setting sun while endlessly climbing the lenient hill road.

Stroking his tight chest, Kazuma strayed from the main road and went to an alley.

Sandwiched between buildings on both sides, the path was narrow enough for a car to not be able to get in. It might be because it was dark even during daytime that there were only a few pedestrians here.

The journey was plain and calm. Since it was what he wanted, Kazuma felt a bit relieved. He more or less had to take a detour, but going this direction was a much comfortable way home.

However, Kazuma felt an uncomfortable feeling. He couldn't proceed to go forward.

(...I somehow got a bad feeling.)

The Mages' Guild had a surprisingly large number members. There was quite a population in Ishana. As the majority of them were students, although they mostly were doing club activities during this time of day, it was still unusual even for the alley to not have a single soul sighted at this time in the afternoon.

To begin with, there was no human presence.

...No.

(Wrong. Someone's here...)

Somehow arriving at that conclusion, Kazuma stopped walking as if seized with fear.

He was being watched by someone. That feeling wasn't something that could be measured. It was the first time he had sensed someone's presence this clearly.

He got a somewhat very unpleasant feeling.

What should I do? Should I turn back? The moment Kazuma thought about it and started to step backwards... he heard a voice coming from somewhere.

"——Hey, watch out."

"Eh?"

"It's coming. Dodge!"

Someone was speaking to him from somewhere. As soon as he thought about that, a tension as if being pierced by a fine thread stabbed Kazuma's thin chest.

The next instant, a sharp noise grazed his ear.

Kazuma's body spontaneously moved. Twisting his body, he leaped away.

At the same time, behind him, the noise of a terribly dangerous slash tore through the alley's eerie silence.

"Wha...!?"

Kazuma turned around in a hurry.

He couldn't believe the scene he saw there.

The stone paving which had been regularly spread all over was deeply gouged, completely changed to a horrible appearance he had never seen before. What could have been used to make it became like this? It was incomprehensible. Kazuma's head turned like a creaking tin doll.

Nearby the hollowed ground, a mysterious figure stood up. A tiny, child-like body, triangular ears protruding on top of the head, long and thin tail branched into two. It was like a cat standing on two legs.

Was it a human? Or was it a monster? Both of that inexplicable being's large paws... hands, tightly gripped dully shining twin short swords.

"W-wait. Give me a break already."

There was nothing to be amused about, but Kazuma's mouth reflexively pulled into a smile.

Judging from this situation, there was no mistaking that the one who gouged and slashed that ground was the small being there.

Perhaps it was done by using the pair of short swords gripped on both of its hands.

But as long as there was no remarkable difference between Kazuma's and the world's knowledge, hollowing out a stone paving using a pair of short swords in such a short time was nothing short of an impossible feat. It's definitely incorrect for the cat-like being to have a disposition of needing to destroy stone paving no matter what.

What those swords were supposed to cut was not the hard ground... but Kazuma.

Cold sweat trickled down his back.

When Kazuma clumsily retreated, the cat he encountered once again prepared to reversely grip the short swords inside a gloomy shadow. Along with the cold points of those swords, the cat's large eyes sharply seized Kazuma.

"...Kazuma Kuvaru."

The cat spoke. It was a low, hoarse male voice.

Kazuma's feet came to a sudden stop.

"Ye-yes. That's me... but who might you be?"

Even for him, it was an idiotic response. But if he didn't do so, the balance of his spirit would crumble.

It was bizarre no matter how he thought. A cat walking on two feet while wielding swords. It was ridiculous for it to exist in reality...

"I am Tomonori. ...I have come to kill you."

No sooner after he coldly spoke, the cat jumped.

Slashing noises buzzed. The two blows definitely didn't possess threat nor suppression, but an intention that went in accordance with his declaration.

"Hii... Uwaaah!?"

It was like approaching wind. Losing himself, Kazuma started to run away. His body was lowered as if falling to the ground, then a sword grazed the tip of his hair.

He couldn't stay still in that spot, Kazuma crawled. Then he placed his back to the wall of a building and tried to turn his face around.

"Haah, haah... W-wait. Please wait."

His heart was rampaging as if it went frenzy.

It wasn't a lie, prank, or dream. That cat was planning to kill him. He would be killed. A fear like a needle with a stench of blood pricked Kazuma's whole body.

The cat looked over his shoulder. The cold pair of beast eyes stared at Kazuma.

"...You dodged."

"I-isn't it natural!? Wouldn't I die if I didn't dodge!?"

Although he retorted with a loud voice, it seemed Kazuma himself didn't even understand how he had been able to dodge. He did it despite the thought that he would surely die when he sensed the swords were being swung.

This time, the cat silently approached to cut him.

"Hii...!"

Kazuma ran. He had heard that when a human is driven to extreme situations, they usually display unimaginable capability. But now, it felt certainly true.

Even now, he barely evaded the assaulting slashes as they grazed his skin.

However, that fortune wouldn't last forever.

Tripping on the crooked ground which the cat had previously gouged, Kazuma fell forward and collapsed. The severe impact didn't do anything particular to his whole body, but he got a burning pain on his arm.

Though he felt that he shouldn't look at it, Kazuma accidentally saw it. The spot slightly below the left shoulder of his uniform was deeply cut. He felt a sensation that the shirt was wet with something.

"Ah, ah..."

Something more vivid than fear overflowed from Kazuma's mind.

As his chin trembled, his teeth made a grinding noise. The beast looked down on him from the shadow of a building which had been deeply colored by the evening. When Kazuma raised his face to the faint footsteps, his eyes met the beast's gaze.

The reversely gripped swords were coldly lifted. The tip of a blade was slightly wet with red.

It was wet with Kazuma's blood. The blades' cold silver color appeared similar to a beast's fangs that wanted much more blood and flesh than that.

He would be killed.

His chest rose and fell as his breathing got disordered. His stomach was cramped with strain and terror. His knees were shivering and made him unable to stand.

It was useless. He couldn't escape.

(Why... Why is this happening to me...)

He would be killed without even knowing the culprit or the reason. While cursing at the ridiculous situation, Kazuma shut his eyes tightly.

He prepared himself for the sensation of the cold blades.

...However, the cat's swords stopped just before cutting Kazuma's flesh.

(H... Huh?)

He thought that something was wrong. After he counted three seconds, Kazuma timidly opened his eyes. From inside the long bangs, he peeked at the bipedal cat.

The cat dropped the blades, which should have been raised overhead, and faced toward the end of a gentle curve. Its huge ears were raised.

Before long, the cat sheathed the two swords into their scabbards, gave Kazuma a glance, and abruptly vanished as it leaped.

Part 2

The presence of the amassed killing intent disappeared. It was the same for the pressure which had been strangling his neck with tremendous force, and also the piercing feeling of tension.

In the same way as when he had appeared, the cat man disappeared like a passing wind.

The day's natural atmosphere came back, bursting free. His hips having completely given out, Kazuma could only sit still in that spot, dumbfounded.

He couldn't comprehend what had happened, even now. He couldn't accept it as a real incident. It felt like he saw the continuation of the strange dream from this morning.

The muffled ears of Kazuma heard approaching footsteps. Kazuma forcibly moved his stiff neck and looked at the direction of the sound. Familiar uniforms were rushing over from the gentle curve he faced.

It was Nine, also Trinity and Celica.

As soon as he saw the figure of the girls, strength left Kazuma's whole body. It might be because of the cleared tension that he got attacked by an intense dizziness which made him almost faint.

"Kazuma-san!"

As if sliding, Celica put her knees in front of Kazuma. Nine quickly looked around the surroundings. A bit delayed and out of breath, Trinity squatted beside Celica with a gloomy face.

"Are you all right, Kazuma-san?"

Trinity held up Kazuma's shivering shoulders. When her green eyes looking into him, Kazuma slackened his mouth and made a feeble smile in order to convey that he still had consciousness.

Near him, Trinity began to smile broadly.

"Thank god... What on earth happened?"

"Well... I also don't really understand."

Thanks to seeing a familiar face, he felt somewhat relieved. Even Kazuma thought that he answered with a pathetic voice. He missed her serene voice. He really thought he was going to be killed.

In the meantime, Celica touched Kazuma's left arm and opened her warm brown eyes wide.

"You're injured here. It's really deep."

"Ah, don't."

Immediately, the words escaped from Kazuma's mouth, he tried to warn her away. Again. He got shivers.

But Celica, who couldn't see what's in Kazuma's mind, interpreted his voice as hesitation. She nodded while smiling as if to encourage him.

"It's okay. It's going to be cured soon."

"Cure...?"

Looking to reassure Kazuma, Trinity explained.

"Celica-san is really skilled in healing magic～."

But behind the long bangs that were concealing his expression, Kazuma frowned.

"Healing..."

He hurriedly stiffened himself and trying carefully not to be rough as he removed Celica's hands. He forcefully dragged his exhausted

body to get up.

Reflexively, he showed a strained smile.

"I, I'm fine. Wounds like this will be healed fast enough... Don't worry."

"Eh, but."

Celica's eyes that seemed like saying 'but it'll be healed instantly' looked up at Kazuma.

Kazuma averted his eyes with all his might. He wasn't very good in this situation. When he got an awful dizziness again, Kazuma leaned his back against the wall of a nearby building.

Nine put both of her hands on her hips and rounded on him as if blocking his way.

"Let's start with the explanation."

The voice changed suddenly from Celica and Trinity's gentle voice to a cautious voice.

While hiding the wound on his arm from Celica by covering it with his hand, Kazuma grimaced.

"Even if I explain..."

Worrying about the bewildered Kazuma, Trinity interrupted with gentle words.

"We came here because Nine said that she sensed an unusual force downtown. And then we saw that Kazuma-san was sitting at the roadside with the road like that~..."

"You must have witnessed what happened. Speak."

Nine glanced at the hollowed stone pavement before settling her glare on Kazuma.

He was weak against Celica's gaze, but he wanted to be pardoned

from Nine's glare even more. He heard that she was the most skilled person in the academy, with offensive magic as her specialty. That fact made it seem like he was being threatened.

"Even if you say I saw it or got involved... A strange creature suddenly appeared and slashed around using sword. The absurd thing there is also its doing."

Wanting to get away from the concentrated gaze, Kazuma directed his line of sight at the ground, looking for sword cuts. The more he looked at it, the more splendid the slashing scars were which made them didn't feel like they belong in reality.

Nine folded her arms confusedly.

"An odd creature you said?"

"Yes. It's similar to both a human and cat..."

"Could it be beastkin...?"

Hearing Kazuma's explanation, Nine frowned and supported her chin with her hand as if she was pondering.

The term Nine used, beaskin, had been covered in the lessons for sure, but today was the first time for Kazuma to actually see it.

It was a strange race located at a point exactly between beast and human. Like magic, their figure never showed up in the front side of the history and only existed in the dark.

But why did one appear in Ishana and attack Kazuma? Nine's question was also Kazuma's question.

"Onee-chan. For the time being, let's take Kazuma-san back to his room. He might get attacked again."

Celica's straightforward voice broke the silence of thought.

Moment by moment, the evening grew thicker. Presently, the eastern sky was slightly blurred with the presence of night. If the sun sunk, this side of the island which was separated from the main

street would get very dark.

Trinity agreed immediately as she nodded.

"She's right. We mustn't let something happen to him on his way back."

"You shouldn't burden yourself that much. I'm really all right now, so..."

"Kazuma-san."

Trinity took a step and drew closer to him.

She tightly joined her hands together in front of her chest as if praying. With height difference existing between them, her pleading eyes looked up at him as if reprimanding him.

"I beg of you, please let us escort you. I can't return and leave you alone here~."

Even though she used the slow tempo tone he heard in the classroom all the time, her sincerity was enough to make his heart ache. In Trinity's eyes, apparently ready to form tears at any moment, her truly genuine concern toward Kazuma was showing. Knowing that, why did he turn her down?

(...Somehow, it feels like I've only been doing refusals today.)

Kazuma was corrected by the thought from inside his chest. Just like always.

As if giving up, Kazuma took a breath and pulled the sides of his mouth to make a smile. In truth, his condition got worse again. It really didn't feel like he was able to walk.

"...Understood. Then please do so."

After he spoke his resignation, Trinity smiled tenderly and grabbed Kazuma's arm. Supporting from below, she held his arm to her chest.

Beyond the uniform jacket, the sensation of a human body was transmitted. Rarely experiencing this sort of close contact, Kazuma didn't know how to react.

Since a normal human would certainly have the memory of being embraced by parents, they must have the fitting emotion in regard to the touch.

Kazuma sighed and thought that it didn't matter.

The feet he urged to step forward were aimless and felt light. Was it because of his poor condition and giddy head? Or was it because his memory-less self had this emptiness that couldn't be filled?

"Can you walk?"

Startled by the smell of custard on Trinity's voice, Kazuma slightly pulled his chin.

"I'm sorry."

"It's fine. I offered after all."

Realizing Kazuma wouldn't resist anymore, Trinity finally spoke with the usual tone. Not outpacing him nor falling behind, Trinity matched her pace with Kazuma's while pulling his arm to urge him forward.

Although he was thankful of her compassion, Kazuma couldn't help but have complicated feelings at accepting Trinity's kindness.

There were many male students in the same year who admired Trinity and Nine. If he was seen like this, he would most likely be called behind the school building and get forced into a fight tomorrow.

With his consciousness receding from time to time while seriously wondering about that thought, Kazuma, accompanied by Trinity, Celica, and Nine, went toward the dormitory.

And then after taking twice as long as usual, Kazuma returned to his own room.

Since Trinity was worried, Celica said as they left that they will quickly come over if something happens. But Nine... only she watched Kazuma with doubting eyes.

After closing the door, his endurance was already at the limit. His head ached so badly. He could no longer grasp the feeling of the floor, he headed toward his bed.

But while it wasn't clear whether he had finally arrived at the bed or not, Kazuma lost consciousness.

Part 3

Kazuma was led by three girls as they left. On the rooftop of a building somewhat distant from them, there was a shadow looking over his figure motionlessly.

A small body that didn't appear human, long tails, sharp triangular ears. It was the beastkin swordsman, Tomonori.

Silent like a still life, he kept watch over Kazuma's retreating figure with sharp eyes. As though confirming his prey.

The air wavered.

Tomonori's ears moved. What wavered wasn't air. It was time and space.

"You're such a useless pet, Tomonori. You didn't obey your owner's command."

From the back, an innocent voice coldly spoke.

Tomonori slightly moved his head.

The shaking just now came from teleportation. The specialty of the beloved daughter of the person Tomonori knew well.

"——Rachel, isn't it."

In a low and small voice, he muttered the name of the person who had appeared behind him.

Rachel Alucard. A girl dressed in black dress with beautiful long golden hair tied up in pigtails. The ribbons used to decorate her hair looked like rabbit ears.

Her outer appearance made her seem around six years old, but she was a master of transferring magic that was extremely difficult to control. She possessed the ability to directly transfer to Ishana which had powerful barrier erected around it.

"...You came here because Clavis told you to?"

While asking the question, Tomonori removed his gaze from Rachel to look downward. His target's figure had already gone. He had failed in killing him.

"Correct. What kind of other errand do you think I have?"

As she spoke with elegant tone that didn't suit her childish appearance and voice, Rachel gently brushed away the hair which had been resting at her shoulder with the back of her hand.

There was slight interest leaking out from the tone of voice that sounded haughty.

"You tried to kill that man."

Tomonori replied with silence. Not concerned about it, Rachel continued.

"Why did you try to kill him? Do you perhaps know something?"

"...You have nothing to do with it. Enough with the tedious talk. Hurry up and take me."

Turning his back to the alley he had been watching, Tomonori moved to stand next to Rachel.

Rachel chuckled a bit. But the words she spoke were the opposite of it.

"Just like usual, you aren't an interesting man."

As she indifferently held out her white hand, a rose-colored magic

field emerged with Rachel at the center. It spread out beneath Tomonori's feet.

"Let us return. My father is waiting."

After the pure voice muttered, a sound similar to whirlwind played and Rachel vanished from Ishana along with Tomonori.

On the sky which was wrapped with the canopy of twilight, the silver full moon was hanging.

That moon wouldn't ever wane. This night wouldn't ever pass. This place was sunk in eternal night. Not located anywhere in the world, the place was like solitary island floating on a valley.

A garden was stretched all over continuously. With crowded ivy crept around the once beautiful place, its appearance was appropriate enough to be called an abandoned garden.

Within the abandoned garden, a large old castle stood with majestic appearance while also entangled with ivy.

It was the residence of a more than one thousand year old vampire, Clavis Alucard.

He had been spending his overly long lifespan watching over humanity. Right now, he sat in a wheelchair facing an old friend inside a parlor, surrounded by tasteful furniture.

"Tomonori. I have too... considered about what you have been thinking."

Locking his fingers above his knees, Clavis started diplomatically.

His long hair and beard were pure white. The locking fingers were so thin it looked like they were withered branches. But, as if his

blood red pupils were detached from his old body, they brimmed with the kind of dignity and intelligence that sometimes felt like they could see through up to the bottom of one's heart.

"However, what I had requested to you was to observe, not to assassinate. You have almost killed a sinless youth... Am I wrong?"

Clavis' voice was calm like a spreading ripple on water's surface.

There were two other presences in the room. Clavis' beloved daughter who was sitting on a soft sofa while drinking black tea with rose aroma, Rachel. And the person standing behind Clavis who was wearing refined suit on his trained body, Valkenhayn R. Hellsing the werewolf.

After looking at them with sidelong glance, Tomonori returned his gaze to Clavis and replied coldly.

"You said I was permitted to cut him down in the worst case."

"...I have certainly said that. But I truly do not think that was a situation befitting that 'worst case'."

The person he was confronting was a man who had watched history play out for over 1000 years. But Tomonori, even in front of those gazing red eyes, full of endless knowledge, didn't show a slightest hint of fear.

"That guy is dangerous. We can't afford to keep him alive."

Since Tomonori's words was declared without any hesitation, Valkenhyan, who had been silent while frowning until now, harshly interrupted.

"The one to decide it is not you!"

But Tomonori moved his gaze to him and stared back at the werewolf butler intensely, as if challenging him.

"I decide what I'm going to do."

It was a composed and had unwavering will of a voice. A

determined voice of a belief that wouldn't let anyone trample it down.

But that belief was pointed at a direction different from Clavis'.

Clavis' chest sank as he sighed.

"It is still not decided that 'he' will become 'so'. If he remains in peace, then he can continue to be a mere student. ...After all, there are many possible futures."

"There's only one future."

Clavis' sensitive words bore a wish and desire for something to happen. Tomonori severed it with a voice that hid strong emotions.

"That guy is aware."

There was no hesitation in Tomonori's declaration, the same for his swords.

"...Tomonori. We are not in the position to judge."

"Your faith is like a dull sword to me."

After he said that, Tomonori turned his back on Clavis.

Clavis partly closed his eyes while watching the small stature. He believed that Tomonori's gentle shoulders would never get yield.

Clavis recalled another man who stood in the same way.

"Well, well, well. Your stubbornness is very similar to Mitsuyoshi's."

Clavis smiled as he muttered. Tomonori fiercely glared over his shoulder at Clavis as he did so.

"I have nothing to do with my brother. Don't ever compare us again."

Valkenhayn displayed his anger toward that remark.

"You insolent. Who do you think you're facing...!"

"That is enough, Valkenhayn."

The skinny hand took control of the enraged Valkenhayn.

If Valkenhayn had assumed the wolf form, then he would laid bare his sharp fangs and roared. But he was before his master. Valkenhayn withdrew with stern expression.

"...I don't need any escort."

Tomonori turned his back again, he left Clavis' room in truth this time.

When the inhuman figure disappeared down the hallway of the old castle, Valkenhayn calmly closed the door that had been left open.

The room was soaked with Clavis' sigh.

"Are you fine with it? That man will undoubtedly..."

Go toward Ishana again. This time, it wouldn't have anything to do with Clavis' request.

After Clavis leaned his back on his wheelchair, he looked up at a gleaming chandelier on the ceiling.

"It is inevitable, Valkenhayn."

The decaying eyelids went down. Within the closed field of vision, Clavis thought about the world. He thought about its history.

"I cannot stop Tomonori. Tomonori is also... a part of humanity."

Thinking, believing, and taking action were the privileges given to humanity. Even if those privileges came from 'danger' that stuck close to the back of Tomonori's 'honesty'.

And it wasn't possible for Clavis to meddle with it. The thousand years of time he spent to gaze at history was coincidentally the same thousand years he remained a spectator. Clavis... no, including Rachel, they were beings that existed outside of fate.

"Valkenhayn. ...Just how will mankind live their life in millennia to come?"

Deciding on something, earning something.

History would continue for a long time to come.

Clavis' eyes already couldn't see the future.

Holding back his words of reply, Valkenhayn prepared a fresh black tea and placed it in front of Clavis. The sweet and abundant rose aroma drifted.

Clavis raised his thin eyelids and gazed at the flickering amber-colored water's surface.

"Nevertheless, he surely left something troublesome... That Relius Clover."

After he had muttered those thoughts, Clavis took a white teacup in his hand.

Part 4

...This is a dream.

Kazuma was aware of it as he was in a scene he had never seen before.

The scene took place in some kind of a laboratory.

The metallic walls and floors were illuminated by cold, white light. There were a great number of flickering green and red lamps attached to some kind of gauges lined up inside the room. Windows were fitted to the walls in every direction. One could see the other side of the walls without obstruction.

When he came to, Kazuma was there.

Being aware that he was seeing a dream itself was a strange feeling. The stage was different, but this might be the continuation of yesterday's dream.

Just as his blurred self wondered about that, his vision moved. The Kazuma inside the dream looked over his shoulder.

From here he could see the figure of young man sitting on a chair, crossing his legs.

"We really going to make use of that guy?"

With an arrogant sound, the Kazuma in the dream spoke.

Just as he thought, this dream was similar to that dream. Although Kazuma had awareness of it, he wasn't allowed to speak as the character inside the dream. It was a dream where he borrowed someone's point of view just to watch the scene.

But the person who was with him wasn't a white-haired young man. It was a blonde man wearing white gown with attire that made him looked like a scientist.

"I'm making use of him since he's useful. He possesses a field of study different from mine. His knowledge and skills are rather interesting. ...Then again, I have already seen those techniques plenty enough."

"The assistant possessing that excellent knowledge and skills seems like a very hardworking person. He secretly went to the hidden room, secluded himself, and ended up engrossed with whatever his work is, y'know."

"I see... If it doesn't turn out to be a hindrance to my work, then it doesn't matter. In any case, it is not something of importance."

The tone of the blonde man when he said that was terribly frank. Neither sarcasm nor joke, he regarded the assistant who had been raised as the topic simply just as a 'tool'. There wasn't any human-like enthusiasm in his way of speaking at all.

"Ha!" said Kazuma... rather, the Kazuma in the dream as he laughed.

"Indeed. Well, you did bring along Shuuichirou Ayatsuki. Do whatever you want, Professor Relius."

Shuuichirou Ayatsuki. Relius. Both of them were names that Kazuma had heard. Especially Relius.

What he was reminded of was that Relius Clover was his guardian whose appearance and background were unknown to him.

Could it be that this blonde man was Relius Clover? Kazuma considered examining the face. But before that, the vision inside the dream moved.

The 'someone' who had become Kazuma's point of view once again faced the huge window. From there, a spacious lower floor could be seen.

Inorganic floors and walls. Inside of them, a bizarre object had its mouth open.

Figuratively speaking, it looked like the crater of a volcano.

As if a ring's prong for holding jewelry, there was some squirming stuff like boiling red lava in the place of diamond at the other side of the device.

Staring it, the Kazuma inside the dream bore a weird uplifting feeling as if it was his missed hometown.

"Is that OK?"

"At present, there is no hindrance."

A frank voice answered from behind.

The Kazuma inside the dream placed both of his hands on the gauges which purpose weren't clear and showed a fearless smile.

"Good work, good work. Then I suppose you can afford taking one more request."

"...What is it this time?"

"It's on your field of expertise. ...It also got something to do with the *Azure*."

"Oh?"

There was a slight hint of interest from the blonde man's voice.

As if something had been let slip, 'he' averted his gaze and smiled.

"My next..."

The sound was no longer heard.

Then the scenery blurred.

Everything became incomprehensible.

Eventually, it got darker and turned black.

The dream came to an end abruptly.

Hearing himself let out a small groan, Kazuma woke up.

Opening his thin eyes, there was scenery of room he used to see beyond the troublesome bangs. It was a room of the Mages' Guild's school dormitory, his own room.

The room was dark with only the faint orange light of the bedside lamp to illuminate it. He didn't know the exact time, but it seemed to be night.

It seemed his had lost consciousness while on the bed. It looked like he had been sleeping all this time. The clothes of his uniform got a bit wrinkled.

He saw a dream.

Just like last night's dream, the dream was in an unknown place and had men he didn't recognize. The details were blur as if they had been rubbed roughly with an eraser. He couldn't remember it well.

Since then... Just how long had passed after he was accompanied by the three girls, Trinity, Celica, Nine, and came back here? Placing his hand on his dazed head as he was still half asleep, Kazuma abruptly raised his body.

The horrible condition of his body was already completely healed.

The wound on his left arm was fully recovered without leaving any trace.

"Aah... Again."

In the room which made it hard to breathe, Kazuma removed his gaze from the torn tunic and dropped his shoulders.

He realized this around two months after he entered the academy. While in class, he cut his finger with notebook paper. In the brief time he was grimacing as the stinging pain ran through, the shallow cut on his skin quickly closed. The small wound disappeared as if it was absorbed.

When he had already forgotten about it, Kazuma got burned in the middle of alchemy experiment. He went to the infirmary as instructed by the lecturer. But as most of it was already healed when he arrived, the doctor laughed while saying he was exaggerating it.

In short, even if he got hurt, it would get immediately healed if he left it alone.

At first he thought that everyone else was like that too. But he found out soon that that wasn't the case.

Unlike the memory loss, no one knew about this strange constitution. If possible, he wanted to keep it hidden and unknown to anyone else. The memory loss might stir sympathies, but this just felt creepy.

"I'm glad... that I declined that girl's healing magic."

If the healing which wasn't related to magic had begun to take place, he wouldn't be able to dodge the issue no matter what his excuse was.

As his drowsiness gradually cleared away, his brain slowly started to function.

When he thought about it, a series of odd things had happened today. Waking up from a strange dream. Setting Trinity aside, having Celica and Nine kept an eye on him had opposing significances to it. Having his physical condition deteriorate without understanding the cause. Being attacked by an assailant without knowing the reason.

Moreover, as if it finally returned, he had seen a weird dream again.

"Just what is really happening?"

After the complaint spontaneously came out, the fatigue spread.

It looked like he saw those dreams as the result of his brain adjusting his memories. Might it have something to do with the memories he lost? Is it okay if he assumed that he was remembering something?

As his mind became clearer, he recalled words from the details of the dream he had mostly forgotten.

Shuuichirou Ayatsuki. Relius. And...

"Azure..."

"You interested in *Azure*?"

Someone suddenly replied to the muttering he let out.

His drowsiness disappeared at once. Kazuma turned around with force as if electrocuted.

The dormitory's room was a room for one person. There was no one else in the room and no friends visiting here. Besides, he had been fast asleep until a while ago.

There shouldn't be anyone else with the exception of Kazuma. Within the room that should have been empty... was an unknown person.

The chair that should have been in front of the desk was moved close to the room's wall. ...Someone was sat in it. The unreliable light from the side lamp made their appearance unclear. Naturally, Kazuma gazed at the staring figure of a person.

It was a thin man. It wasn't clear as he was sitting, but his height seemed about the same as Kazuma's.

Regardless of the darkness, Kazuma couldn't get a look at his face

since he was wearing hood low over his eyes. But when he saw the shown splitting mouth that was like a crescent moon, Kazuma became aware of the eerie smile.

"Wh... who? Who... might you... be?"

While still petrified sat on his bed, Kazuma asked awkwardly.

He got a feeling that he had asked this question just a few hours ago. Unpleasant premonition chilled up his spine.

It couldn't be that he would get suddenly slashed again, could it?

Kazuma reflexively put himself on guard, but this proved unnecessary, the man only shrugged his shoulders while still sitting and didn't show even pretense to stand up.

"Hey, hey. Really, Kazuma-chan? You seriously said that? What a cold greeting. You don't recognize me?"

"No, uh, sorry. I don't remember that we've met..."

The man spoke like he met an old friend, but Kazuma didn't have any idea about this man.

Within the darkness, the man shook his head in disappointment.

"And I helped to save you from danger back then, too. So you forget about the person who saved your life? Is Kazuma-chan perhaps an idiot? Maybe stupid?"

As he said it, Kazuma suddenly remembered. Now that he mentioned it, back when the beastkin attacked, there was a voice instructing him on the verge of it.

It wasn't Trinity, Celica, or Nine's voice, but a young man's. If the voice weren't there, Kazuma would have swiftly died from the first stroke of sword.

"From... from back then?"

"Finally remembered? Then again, you still don't know about the

important part. Aah, how annoying."

The man grinned, but he quickly sighed in dejection.

Kazuma was at loss since he didn't understand the meaning of what the man said. For some reason, he corrected his posture while sitting on top of bed.

Stretching his long legs forward while still sitting, the man looked at Kazuma with snake-like eyes from his hood.

"Since you passed out on the floor, I purposely came here, y'know? After that, I've been here all this time. Weeell, since you didn't wake up, I got lot of free time. And because this room isn't that decent, I wonder why your mind hasn't gone mad living in here."

"Haa. Well, I've been here for seven years."

Just who is this person? Even while he still had questions, Kazuma moved his mouth while still being dumbfounded by the unexpected development.

"So, umm, and you are...?"

"Yuuki Terumi."

"Eh?"

"T-E-R-U-M-I. That's my name."

Kazuma felt like there was a strange air about the name. As if there was a special meaning about it...

"So you have it. Say, Kazuma-chan."

Even though he wasn't being pressed in intimidation, Kazuma gulped. For some reason, he suddenly got captivated by this man's words.

The crescent moon mouth smiled.

"So hear me about this again. ...You want the *Azure*?"

Chapter 3: Mind of Azure Deviation

Part 1

When there was no memory, there was no past.

When there was no past, there was a period of time when he wasn't alive.

All this time, Kazuma was always wondering whether he was truly alive.

Just what exactly was the 'him' who was standing here presently? Was he alive or dead? Had he truly been born? Did he really even exist?

Such doubts always plague his mind.

Since the next day, Kazuma's mind was lighter.

When he woke up on morning, putting on uniform, and heading toward the academy he had gone to for seven years, he was so cheerful. This was the first time he had greeted the morning with a mood such as this according to his short memory.

Usually, he had been living with uncertainty drifting around him. It felt like there wasn't a purpose even when he breathed.

He had wasted the unending time from these seven years only to wonder how deep rootless grass was buried under.

But today was different. No, it would surely be different starting from today.

His memory still hadn't returned and Kazuma still remained an extremely mediocre student. But there was just one big difference.

Kazuma had gained a 'purpose'.

The reason originated from last night.

A mysterious man who called himself Terumi had told him. Its existence was only known to limited number of people, but the Azure certainly existed in this world.

"If you can get the Azure, you can take back whatever you want. Everything. Things you lost, things you forgot, whatever."

Terumi's speech was like a tale from a dream.

Bur for Kazuma, it was indeed like a tale from a dream.

"If I have the thing called Azure, I can get my memories back?"

"Idiot. Not only memories. Everything, eeeeeverything. I said whatever it is, right?"

Whatever it is.

It was certainly tempting.

Until now, Kazuma had never been proactive in remembering his past. It was because he was afraid if he realized that there was no past to remember. And then, he was also afraid if he realized that he absolutely couldn't remember anything.

But if he got the Azure Terumi was talking about... perhaps he might have a chance.

"Azure..."

It was a warm morning. Kazuma was resting his chin in his hands on a desk of the academy's classroom, muttering while he was doing

nothing.

Currently he was in the middle of a class with a female lecturer explaining about an important turning point regarding the history of magic. But as if her voice was distant like the congestion of the city, it never entered Kazuma's ears.

Kazuma's mind was occupied with nothing but the Azure.

Terumi never mentioned the specifics about that object. However, other than it definitely existed, he only gave a guarantee that it would give everything to Kazuma.

Terumi was a suspicious man whose background was unknown and never frankly showed his contentment.

Kazuma also had a thought that there was something wrong with him to just swallow the words of such a man. Normally when he thought about it, such a convenient thing as what Terumi had spoken of couldn’t possibly exist.

But even if he had doubts about it, Kazuma thought that it was okay even if it was a lie.

The important thing was that he wanted to get his memories back, and that there was a way to do so.

Out of just walking silently every day in the path of ordinary student which Relius Clover had arranged, it might be possible to return to those days as his true self.

It was okay even if it could only inspire such faint hope.

The bell marking the end of the class rang. Kazuma lifted his face as he came to his senses. In the end, there wasn't a single character filling his notebook. He also couldn't recall the contents of the lesson.

On a normal day, he would have been more or less regretted that he had been dazing around. But today, there wasn't even a tiny amount of that feeling.

The lesson didn't matter. After Kazuma put the unused notebook and pen to his bag, he stood up with determination.

"...I'll search for it."

I want to regain my memories.

I want to know who and what kind of person I am.

It was the first time he clearly thought about that. It was also the first time he felt that he was truly living in this world.

First, he must make it his objective to find out just what the Azure was and where it could be found.

Fortunately, this here was Ishana——the Mages' Guild. The history hidden from the whole world was gathered on this island.

As Kazuma grabbed his bag, he left the classroom without looking back.

Cutting across the academy's courtyard and then proceeding to the side of the auditorium, a building with soaring green roof on white walls appeared.

The building with its size approximately as big as a small scale school was the academy-managed Great Library.

Not only for the students, the library was opened for Mages' Guild's staff members as well as the island's inhabitants. As the book collection consisted of books which weren't expected to survive or exist, it wasn't inferior to other libraries around the world.

It was reasonable for this library to have books that had existed in secret.

The inside was very large, and also very quiet.

The walls were white and there were endless polished stone tiles that went on and on. There were towering bookshelves as far as the tall ceilings. Ladders were placed everywhere in order to get to books placed at high altitudes.

The light from outside couldn't enter at all. All the illuminations were produced by magic. Different from artificial light bulb, the gentle lights gave off a whimsical atmosphere in the entire library.

Ever since the noon recess two days ago, Kazuma hadn't attended classes, only going back and forth between the dormitory and here.

He attempted to use the search system for the book collection to look up about the Azure, but he was only guided to books that clearly didn't have any relation to it. Although he looked them over just to be sure, the majority of them were some sort of silly stories. Even if it wasn't like that, he couldn't rely upon the likes of artful writings and poems.

Lores which weren't made public, ancient magic patterns, synthetic tables of alchemy. Every religious ceremony around the world from ancient times. On top of those, the latest technology of science and medical treatment, also the combination between alchemy and science.

Even when he searched for books that came into his mind, it didn't appear they had the right description.

"Not good..."

When he closed the last copy of the book he brought from his countless round-trips, Kazuma's head fell over the desk while he groaned.

It looked like it didn't give any result.

He read books and books, but all of them were wrong. Since this failure couldn't make him to proceed even for one millimeter toward somewhere, he got broken hearted as expected.

"...Does it even exist?"

Azure that is.

He didn't expect to be able to examine it in detail, but he didn't think that he couldn't find even a glimpse of it.

"In the first place, just what 'Azure' is...? It'd be nice if he just told me that much."

While grumbling, he poked the front cover of the book he had closed, feeling irritated.

Creature, substance, device, organization, belief, or concept. He couldn't get a plausible clue about what kind of object the obscurely-named Azure was.

As his forehead hit the desk, Kazuma let out a sigh.

"Maybe I should ask Terumi again..."

However, it didn't seem likely for that man to tell him. He had asked various questions regarding the Azure, but in the end, he was told to look it up himself.

(Hmm, but wait.)

For example, in the case that the Azure really existed and was an unfathomable technique that could make everything possible. Such ridiculous things might not just simply be recorded in books.

Moreover, would such books usually get accessed and placed in these bookshelves which the people on the island or anyone else could read?

(If I think about it, it's not strange for it not to be here.)

It was natural if it was treated like classified information. And it sounded more credible, too.

However, even if that was true, what other places should he investigate? Since the books here didn't have information as far as

rumors, there was no other way but to aim for the rumor he heard about the Mages' Guild's highly classified information next.

(Mage’s Guild's highly classified information... huh.)

Despite the current Mages' Guild's standpoint, there were things which were considered vital that shouldn't be publicized. Regardless that it was only their existences that were recognized, no one knew about the details.

The way to the deep underground below the Cathedral had secure barrier stretched which wouldn't let anyone other than Ten Sages to trespass. It might be stored there...

"Kazuma-san?"

"UWAH!?"

Tapped on the shoulder from behind, Kazuma, forgetting where he was, let out a hysterical voice.

The impulse made him fall from his chair. In a panic, he clung to the back of the chair and made clattering noise while lifting his face. As he did that, the smiling figure of Trinity was there.

"I'm sorry. Did I surprise you~?"

"I-It's okay. I was just a bit dazed."

Kazuma quickly got a look at his unsightly position. He smiled as if to smooth things over.

Pushing up her large circular glasses with her fingers, Trinity stared at the desk in wonder.

"Were you checking up on something?"

"Aah, yes. Something personal has been on my mind."

While answering without any offense, Kazuma piled up the thrown out books in haste and pushed them to the side of the table.

"Umm. I might sound meddling, but..."

Being conservative while lowering her eyebrows as if she was apologizing, Trinity started with the prelude.

"Today, it seems you didn’t attend the classes. You also didn't yesterday... and the afternoon before, too."

"...So you came to warn me? As one would expect from the well-conducted Trinity Glassfille-san. You don't overlook your irresponsible fellow classmates."

He unintentionally let sarcasm slip out.

Not expecting that kind of remark from Kazuma, Trinity looked a bit surprised and had a bewildered expression.

"Well, that wasn't my intention. I apologize if I hurt your feelings."

Neatly putting both hands on front of her body, Trinity bowed her head courteously. Her soft platinum blonde hair gently swayed.

"Only... Kazuma-san, until now, you have never skipped classes even once. I got a little worried about how you're doing～."

"You're worried?"

Those words had a strange feeling to it.

How could she feel that way not to herself, but to someone else? Kazuma was baffled. She didn't wish for reward or expect any gratitude. The earnest kindness of Trinity was... awkwardly warm.

He didn't think he deserved to receive such affection that asked nothing in return.

Unrelated to Kazuma's feeling, Trinity kept a light expression and smiled charmingly like a doll.

"If it won't hinder you, can I assist you in the matter you're checking on? Since I come here often, I may have a rough grasp on the kind of book and its whereabouts."

Hesitating to talk, Kazuma scratched his cheek. He would gladly accept it if the matter he was investigating was related to a lesson. But it wasn't the case. Besides.

"It pains me, but I was just about to finish. Sorry."

"Oh my... it's me who should apologize. It'd be nice if I had called out to you much sooner."

"Ha ha. Looks like it."

While using his laugh to feign ignorance, Kazuma didn't look at Trinity's eyes.

As Kazuma arranged the books and stood up, Trinity seemingly confused, asked him:

"What were you searching for to make you seclude yourself in the library for two days?"

"Eh... Ah."

His body stiffened.

Peeking with sidelong glance, he saw Trinity looking in his direction with a curious look on her face.

She shouldn't have any ulterior motive. He understood that much. But having such pure and innocent eyes directed at him meant he couldn't help but think that she was only pretending, in order to inflict great harm to him.

"Umm... It was something... about my memory."

He couldn't lie, but he couldn’t say the truth either.

However, Trinity didn’t have a slight doubt to Kazuma's vague reply. Putting both hands on her white cheeks, her eyes sparkled as she was both astonished and joyful.

"Oh! Could it be that you've remembered something?"

"No, it's not like that. Only, it seems... there's a way to recover it. But since the method isn't widely known, I thought that maybe I could get some clue here."

Kazuma packed the books and arranged them before putting them back on the desk again.

He took a light breath. As he was with Trinity, he wanted to keep things like planning and calculating away.

When she was near, it was like time flowed slower.

Even with the slight hesitation which remained in Kazuma's mind, he rubbed it off and opened his mouth again.

"...Can we have a little talk?"

"But of course."

Trinity's soft voice gently urged him.

Kazuma hesitated again... and then he began to talk.

"I haven't given much thought about my memory loss. But when I talk with people and try to relate... I can't handle it well no matter what. When something like that happens, the memory-less me feels cheated. It felt like my feelings and emotions weren't enough when compared to other person."

The impression he wanted to give was lacking and didn't strike home. He didn't get the right tuning point.

He had a feeling like an important part was completely left out when his human soul was taking form.

"Sometimes, it feels like I'm different from other people. It'd be preferable if I were superior than the others, but I have a big disadvantage compared to other people. ...I feel like it's only me who doesn't have a presence."

"It must be... lonely."

Trinity murmured sympathy.

Giving sympathy that didn't have even a slight sarcasm on it seemed like Trinity's virtue.

"Of course I got used to it. It's not like I feel agony every day, you know? ...But."

Not finding the right words, Kazuma closed his mouth.

However, it was already enough. He felt a little better having put out his feelings.

Trinity was the first person he spoke his mind to. It might be because of her comforting air, or perhaps the indifferent silence of the Great Library.

When the warm feeling came to an end, this time he felt a little embarassed, Kazuma seemingly scratched his head roughly.

"Ah."

Suddenly, he had a thought.

When he raised his face, his eyes met Trinity's gaze while she had a blank look. Since Trinity herself couldn't clearly see Kazuma's eyes, it was Kazuma who knew that their gazes had collided.

"Trinity Glassfille-san. If I'm not mistaken, you are a close friend to Nine of the Ten Sages, right?"

"Eh? Yes, that's right～."

"Then can you talk it over with her? It's extremely unlikely for the matter I'm searching for to be discovered in this library's books. But if it's the Mages' Guild's highly classified information... if it's the confidential information that's stored inside the Cathedral by the Ten Sages, then...!"

Nine was one of the Ten Sages. Let alone inspecting highly classified information, she was in charge of it.

Certainly, she wouldn't comply if it was Kazuma who was asking, but she might if it was Trinity. As he felt a slight hope, he lifted his head with a bit of expectation.

"Kazuma-san."

However, even that disappeared with Trinity's single word.

Trinity retracted her sweet smile and her pink lips tightened. With a seriousness that didn't suit her, she stared straight at Kazuma.

"I understand the matter you're searching for is very important to you. I know it's something beyond my comprehension, and I can tell you're really serious about it. But... your request just isn't possible."

With meek demeanor, there was firm strength hidden in Trinity's words.

Kazuma sighed in disappointment. He didn't consider that it would go smoothly, but he got depressed after being strongly rejected.

"So it's no good?"

"Yes, it's not possible."

Even then, Trinity still gave a modest smile.

"I'm really sorry that I can't be of help."

"Oh no, forgive me for asking unreasonable things."

If he thought about it calmly, it was unthinkable for the gentle Trinity, who also had a strong sense of duty, to do something that would hurt her position as a friend. Once he knew it was useless, Kazuma had to think about the next step no matter what.

As he held the piled up books along with his bag, Kazuma lightly smiled in a friendly manner.

"It seems I've said some strange things. Please forget about it. And thank you for your concern. I will return to the dorm once I put these books away."

Before he got questioned any further, Kazuma prepared to leave from the spot as if he was fleeing.

Trinity's voice stopped him from doing that. This time, it was the voice he had always heard. A sweet voice that was filled with affection.

"I'm sure Kazuma-san will get those memories back. That's why, please don't be so reckless. I'm willing to give you a hand if I'm capable of it."

Kazuma only looked over his shoulder. He replied with indifferent smile.

He was grateful for her sympathy. But sympathy alone wouldn't let him reach the Azure.

Part 2

When he got outside, the sky had been dyed in bitter orange as if burning before he knew it.

The evening in Ishana which almost always had clear weather, save for a few rainy days, was lovely. The buildings and the trees were painted in the setting sun's vivid color.

Retracing his steps back through the academy's courtyard to get to the main school, Kazuma's cheeks got faintly hot as the evening sunlight blazed down on them like it did to the buildings and trees without exception.

Kazuma's manner of walking was nothing like a light walk. His gaze was dropped to the ground and the hand that didn't carry his bag was inserted into the pocket of his trousers.

He had been thinking.

The books that were kept in the Mages' Guild's Great Library practically couldn't be obtained in other places. They described stuff that was related to magic, sorcery, and alchemy around the world. The description of the past that hadn't been marked down in official history. There was no place but Ishana where such books could be found in any kind of number.

However, it was no good there.

The books in the Great Library were only the surface of the so called hidden part of the world. They were things that had been passed down to humanity without any kind of obstruction; or even, they had to be passed down. There was no Azure among them.

To approach the Azure, an even deeper information was required. Information hidden from the world, placed deep at the bottom.

For example, the Mages' Guild's highly classified information.

"But such a thing..."

For a common student who didn't have authority like Kazuma, there was nothing that could allow him to inspect those classified information. Unless he was a Sage, he wouldn't be able to do it.

Thinking about the Ten Sages reminded him of Nine again.

Desperate, maybe he should ask her directly. But he immediately dismissed that thought. It could be said that the possibility for her to pay attention to him was zero. In addition, Nine had strange wariness toward him.

"Haa... What should I do?"

His thin shoulders dropped as he sighed.

Even if the hope called Azure existed, he didn't know how to get to get to the entrance of the method he finally discovered.

Dragged by disappointment, he exited the school gate and headed to the dormitory. Disregarding the surrounding scenery while his feet carried him on autopilot, he approached the alley where he was attacked a few days ago.

He didn't feel like going there alone anymore.

As if seeing something unpleasant, Kazuma gave it a glance. A figure came out from the alley as if it had been waiting for him.

"Ah..."

Kazuma was startled and let out the small cry.

It was Terumi.

"Hey, Kazuma-chan. Returning from school?"

Standing with the burning red sky behind him, his silhouette was outlined in red and black, making it looked sinister for some reason.

With the same usual unreadable expression and a crescent moon-like grin underneath the hood pulled low over his eyes, he got close to Kazuma.

"What's wrong? You look like in a bad mood. Something troubling you?"

"No. It's not like it's troubling..."

Getting tapped roughly on his back, Kazuma started walking after being urged by Terumi.

Avoiding the alley, they took the road that headed straight to the dormitory. Although he didn't really want to be seen by other people when he was with Terumi, he didn't want to go to an even more deserted street.

Walking onwards as the sun set, Kazuma stole a glance at Terumi.

Terumi was an odd man.

Even though Terumi knew a lot about him, Kazuma didn't know anything about Terumi. However, Kazuma once again felt like he knew Terumi from a long time ago.

Perhaps knew Terumi during the forgotten seven years before.

Since he would get dejected if his assumption was wrong, Kazuma couldn't voice it now. But someday... for example, if he could know more about it after getting the Azure, he wanted to have private conversation about Terumi.

Straying from the continuing stone-paved road, Kazuma turned towards a public park through an avenue. With the sun shining, the park was bustling with the voices of many children. The nice park was spacious with an unobstructed view.

Usually, Kazuma returned to the dormitory by taking a detour from this park. It was because he disliked the merry laughing voices of the children.

But now this annoying laughter gave him relief. Since the children

were playing in the park like he expected, there shouldn't be anyone brandishing swords swooping down on him.

From the other day's situation, it seemed that beastkin had been avoiding there being any possible witnesses to his attack.

"The park is lively... just like usual."

As if grumbling, Kazuma more or less wearily murmured.

He usually only glanced at it from the outside, but the boisterous noise was beyond his expectation.

The children determinedly chasing after a ball as if there was fun in it. With the scene of out of his sight, Kazuma went through the avenue along with Terumi. It trees in the park and its vicinity had been growing since the island was first established. They stood considerably tall and imposing.

"Though the outside is in danger of world destruction, this island doesn't seem to give a damn at all."

Terumi walked at the same pace as Kazuma, making loud footsteps on stone tiles of the avenue. He was trying to act like he cared by shaking his head while letting out a sympathizing voice, but he failed badly.

The lively scene he gave a sidelong glance at didn't make good impression on him, Terumi distorted his mouth and blatantly averted his eyes as if bored with it.

"So, Kazuma-chan."

"Yes?"

"You seem to give the Mages' Guild's highly classified information quite an attention there."

Terumi began to spoke suddenly.

Kazuma's pace altered as he became puzzled.

"...Did I ever speak about that?"

"Hmmmm, no?"

Teasing him, Terumi smirked. His protruding chin slightly facing toward Kazuma.

"I know about it. Even if you don't say anything, I know it. I can read what you're thinking after all."

A chill shot down Kazuma's spine at the sound of Terumi's voice, which sounded as if he was threatening a small child. Before he could think it was untrue, he thought that it was possible if it was Terumi.

After he took a look at Kazuma, Terumi burst into laughter.

"Kukukuku. What, did you take it seriously? Idiot. Of course that isn't possible. I heard you talking about it back at the library."

"Library... Did you mean when I was speaking to Trinity-san?"

"Hmm. So the girl with glasses is called Trinity, huh."

Kazuma's face turned bitter as if he had been spat on by Terumi's affirmation.

Kazuma felt considerable gratitude toward Trinity who gave him a feeling of friendship which brightened his normally empty every day life. Should he laugh at that girl, criticizing her behavior? Or should he laugh along with her?

He almost laughed just now.

"It would've been fine if you had just called out to us back then. Eavesdropping is bad manners, you know?"

"Manners? I have bad manners!? Shit, you're making me laugh! Hey hey, Kazuma-chan. Just because you got imprisoned in this disgusting island for seven years, don't get so corrupted that you want to become a honorable magician."

"Hey, please don't talk like that in the middle of the city..."

The flustered Kazuma interrupted Terumi's words while being startled at the same time.

What a nerve to just casually speak ill of Mages' Guild while treading on the land of Ishana, which was under protection of Mages' Guild.

Terumi spoke with provocative tone like it was unclear whether he realized it or not, or realizing it but pretended he didn't know about it.

"Besides, you think it's okay if I called out to you? The atmosphere was really nice, y'know. Youth is really nice, isn't it～."

"Spare me already. Trinity-san and I don't have anything like that."

Kazuma was bad at that topic. Completely indifferent to Kazuma's tone of voice, Terumi put his hand on his forehead and shaking his shoulders like there was something amusing.

"Hahaha. Hehe, I see. Then again, women are frightening. Generally, they don't care about our intention. Don't you remember? Be careful, Kazuma-chan... Kuku."

"Thank you for the advice."

He was completely ridiculed. Kazuma's mouth was warped as he replied with cold nod.

Nevertheless, the still laughing Terumi still spoke a bit ironically.

"While I'm at it, I'll tell you something. The Mages' Guild's highly classified information... It surely exists inside the Cathedral. But that thing isn't like what you think."

Kazuma's expression tensed when he heard Terumi's manner of speaking. Couldn't believe it so suddenly, he looked at the hooded man beside him as if peeking at him.

The trees in the public park seemed to rustle as if to signify the

unrest.

"Do you know the contents of the classified information?"

Terumi lightly nodded.

"Yeah, I know I know. Where might that be, hmm?"

"No way. There's only a few people including the Ten Sages who know about all of the classified information, isn't there? How can Terumi-san..."

It really didn't seem likely for Terumi to be deeply affiliated with Mages' Guild. No matter how he looked at him, Terumi looked like an outsider. How could he acquire the knowledge of this highly classified information?

Kazuma's voice was clouded with doubt. He looked at Terumi's eyes, which were glaring as if making fun of him.

"What, you don't believe it? Well, I don't really care if you believe it or not. "

"...Then please tell me. What exactly is the Mages' Guild's highly classified information?"

It was true for the Azure, but likewise, he didn't know anything about the matter called Mages' Guild's highly classified information.

Terumi stopped and turned around in a pompous manner at the questioning Kazuma who was testing him.

Kazuma also stopped almost at the same time. It was evening in the public park. While listening toa distant sound that was like from different dimension compared to the merry voices of the children, he faced Terumi.

Terumi showed his usual smile. A smile that ridiculed people.

"You want me to tell you? I'm okay with telling you... But right now, you don't have any business with the classified information."

"I believe I have something to do with it. You were saying you have knowledge regarding the Azure and the classified information, but you won't tell me what it is. Even if you say so, I don't have confidence in your words."

"Haa. Kazuma-chan's such a worrywart~."

Kazuma undauntedly talked back to Terumi who was trying to get Kazuma into his pace. Terumi calmly laughed at Kazuma like he was offended by him.

"Don't be afraid. It exists, okay? Rea~lly exists. Maybe saying it's a way to reach Azure is better than giving you information."

"A way to reach Azure..."

"As for the meaning of it, find it yourself. Don't get people to tell you everything. Like they say, you should be willing to go through struggles. ...Right, Brother?"

As he spoke, Terumi grabbed Kazuma's shoulder and pulled him toward himself. Terumi's fingers were thin, but it dug to the flesh of Kazuma's shoulder with strength that could disrupt the joints.

Terumi looked at Kazuma who was grimacing because of the pain from the surprise attack as Terumi forced him to get close. He then showed a mysterious smile.

"Listen, you need to get to the Azure by yourself. This is what you'd call a fate that can’t be avoided, got it?"

Even if you don't get it, say that you do. With such atmosphere, Terumi whispered in low tone.

Kazuma cast his eyes down as if he overpowered.

Just what actually is the Azure? To begin with, why is the management on the Cathedral so secure? If it's to protect the highly classified information, then what actually is that information?

Numerous numbers of question accumulated in his chest.

But just like Terumi said, it supposed to be his fate. He must pursue the Azure. No matter how difficult that was.

Still looking downward, Kazuma muttered faintly.

"...Someone that isn't a Ten Sage won't be permitted to get inside the Cathedral. It doesn't seem likely for Mages' Guild to give permission either."

"Well, thinking about it normally, it's useless to try to outwit the Ten Sages just by words. It's a purpose the Mages' Guild has been continually doing for hundreds of years, y'know?"

Even before Kazuma, there should be people who had an interest with the Mage’s Guild's highly classified information for various circumstances. No one had been successful in making contact with the classified information.

Persisting to protect the classified information with obstinate security was why the Mages' Guild continued to have a great presence in the hidden side of history. The Mages' Guild's massive history seemed to indicate that it was a symbol of authority's foundation; a symbol that wasn't easy to associate with.

"But then, what should I do?"

"Use your head a little, dear student. Besides, I'm not much of a thinker."

Terumi who seemed to be really appalled had his mouth distorted. As he started to walk again, his black leather shoes crrunched as they trampled the pebbles below which were carried over from the public park by wind.

It seemed these were the only hints he'd get.

Kazuma dashed to catch up with Terumi. Advancing while giving a sidelong glance to the trees that were planted in regular interval, he kept thinking and concentrating.

The problem lied on the Ten Sages and securities who kept a watchful eye on intruders. They had eyes to see Kazuma, mouths to

reprimand him, and brain to decide his punishment. Unless these obstructive people were away from the Cathedral, he couldn't do much.

"For example... When all the Ten Sages got involved in a situation away from the Cathedral..."

While thinking, Kazuma let out an incoherent muttering.

Beside him, Terumi seemed amazed and snorted.

"Good thinking... is what I wanted to say. Kazuma-chan, even a kid can think that much, y'know? That isn't the number one problem here. Think harder."

"...I know."

'I was about to think about that just now, so don't interrupt me' was what Kazuma's innermost thoughts bore. He then gave it a thought again.

An ordinary and inconspicuous student who casually walked along and then stopped by the Cathedral. A situation like that wouldn't draw much attention and he might be able to slip past the Ten Sages' eyes.

(But how can I produce such situation...?)

There was no meaning of it if the situation wasn't a situation that could only be resolved by Ten Sages, not the teaching staff and the town's vigilance committee. Then, his thought was interrupted.

"Aaah. As you were thinking, some dangerous guys got near."

Again, Terumi abruptly changed the topic. He stopped walking beside Kazuma before he could ascertain the reason.

"What are you talking about, Terumi-san..."

Stopping shortly, Kazuma asked him while surveying their surroundings. Then, he finally noticed.

It should have been the usual scene, but there wasn't a single one of those annoying children there. The same was also true of the parents who normally sat, having a pleasant chat nearby. The same for the elders who sat on the benches while gazing at the sky in daze.

With the exception of Kazuma and Terumi, there wasn't anyone else in the public park.

Terumi sneered like he was spitting at the thought.

"Not magic. Ars, eh."

"A-Ars?"

"Something like a counterfeit. Simply put, it's locked us up inside this public park."

"Locked us up? Just who...!?"

Even when returning home by deliberately choosing a path that had a lot of people, it seemed he would experience strange things again. Kazuma went to panic, having had enough of it.

While Terumi fearlessly raised his mouth, he returned his glance at Kazuma as if urging him.

"Who you say? Well, isn't it them?"

Blocking the avenue on the front and the rear side, three silhouettes of people outfitted with black clothing surrounded Kazuma and Terumi.

Part 3

The park should have been bustling with kid's voices. It had fallen ominously silent.

The laughter, creaking noises of playground equipment, and jarring crying voices disappeared aas if they had been illusions. The surrounding scenery grew dull. The atmosphere was like that of a deserted ruin.

Standing within the midst of it were Kazuma and Terumi.

And the three figures who had appeared all of a sudden.

Their silhouettes and postures very much resembled the person Kazuma encountered a few days ago.

Triangular ears protruding from their heads, their swaying long and narrow tails, their bodies completely wrapped in their black garb. They wore hoods, pulled low over their brows, as well as strange black masks as if to conceal their faces.

It was bizarre. But thanks to that, it was easy to guess that they had some relation to the beastkin Tomonori from a few days ago.

It was just as easy to guess who their target was.

"Wh-Who on earth are you!?"

Kazuma's throat stiffened as he let out the question. He took a step back as his voice faltered.

Ishana was protected by the Mages' Guild's barrier, so it should have been the safest city in the world. Nevertheless, it had now suffered two attacks in such a short period. Kazuma couldn't understand how it was possible.

On the other hand, Terumi displayed a nonchalantly put his hands into the pockets of his trousers as if he understood the situation.

"How rare. Aren't they half-beastkin?"

"Ha... Half-beastkin?"

"Beastkins are like incomplete brutes that aren't human or animal. But a brute that fails to fall into the category of human or beastkin is called a half-beastkin."

Now that he mentioned it, they were certainly taller than Tomonori. However, they were too short to be adult humans, and their strange postures gave too odd a feeling.

The unfamiliar odd feeling turned to fear.

Kazuma forced his stiff legs to retreat, but found his progress halted as his back hit something.

He thought it was the trunk of one of the trees surrounding the park, but he was wrong. There was nothing there. There was space between the trees, but it was as if there was an invisible wall that prevented Kazuma from retreating.

"That's as far as you'll get. You can't escape. I said there's an ars here, right?"

Terumi laughed at Kazuma's shocked expression, as if he were a foolish child.

"The cat bastard from before used that ars too, back then. Didn't you realise?"

"Ah... That's why back then..."

There wasn't anyone else on the street.

While pressing his body close to the invisible wall, Kazuma trembled at the new revelation.

He didn't know the name of the executed ars, but it seemed to be a

small scale barrier. Perhaps last time Nine appeared after breaking the barrier.

In other words, as long as the ars wasn't canceled by the half-beastkins, or destroyed by Kazuma,, it was impossible to escape. But under the circumstances, Kazuma simply couldn't cancel the ars.

As if enjoying this desperate situation, Terumi put an arm around Kazuma's shoulders while grinning.

"Looks like they're involved with the beastkin from the other day... So, these guys are dangerous; whatcha gonna do, Kazuma Kuvaru-kun?"

"Wh-What can I do?"

As Kazuma got flustered and bewildered, the half-beastkins, simultaneously leaped.

They shortened the distance instantaneously while their dull silver blades cut the air.

"Hiee...!"

Kazuma desperately lowered his body and ran. The blade of the half-beastkin slashing at the spot Kazuma had stood just a moment before.

The unhesitating attack made Kazuma quickly turn pale.

He was reminded of the other day's attack. Tomonori had also tried to kill Kazuma without any hesitation. Moreover, there were three opponents this time.

One after another, the half-beastkins attacked with their respective weapons. One wielding a sword; the next throwing daggers; while the third wore large claws on both hands.

The half-beastkin wielding the sword leaped and swung downward at Kazuma. Daggers were thrown, aiming for Kazuma's darting feet. As if waiting for Kazuma to escape the other attacks, the third assailant rushed in to attack with its claws. It looked random, but it

was a well coordinated strike.

Kazuma rolled away, desperately trying to dodge their onslaught.

As soon as he turned away, he heard a blade fly past his ear. The noise gave him goose bumps.

"Hii... Uwaah... Hah... Hah..."

Standing with his back against a trunk as if locking his body to it, Kazuma's disordered breath made his shoulders heave furiously.

Why is this happening? The question kept repeating itself in his head.

"Ooh, ooh. That's a surprisingly skillful dodge."

Terumi's voice resounded from unexpectedly nearby.

Kazuma turned his near tearful face. Terumi was sitting on a nearby bench as though it was his afternoon off, leisurely crossing his legs.

Kazuma pleaded to Terumi with a desperate look while hugging his school bag.

"D-Don't just watch! Help me!"

"Eeh? Me? What a bother."

"How can you say it's a bother...!"

While keeping his attention focused on the half-beatkins' movements, Kazuma implored Terumi.

But Terumi leisurely dangled his feet while carelessly resting his chin in his hand, watching Kazuma.

"In the first place, even if I don't give you a hand, you can avoid these guys' attacks. Don't you want all the attention? Just play along."

"T-That's..."

After Terumi spoke, Kazuma suddenly had a doubt.

When the beastkin who called himself Tomonori attacked, his slashes always grazed Kazuma's skin, making him fear the reaper with every strike. Still, how could it not result in his death back then? There was no explanation outside of good luck or a miracle.

But now he felt a little... or a lot of, given the situation, self-composure.

These guys were slow. Much slower than Tomonori.

"...It seems so."

It wasn't easy, but he could avoid their attacks if he watched carefully. It gave the cornered Kazuma hope. But he immediately realized it didn't change the situation in the slightest.

"But no matter how well I dodge, it's pointless if I can't fight back, isn't it?"

"Aah, right. Sooner or later you'll get tired and may be killed by a slash."

"I-I don't want to die...!"

As Kazuma yelled miserably, the half-beastkins attacked in tandem again. Their killing intent surely held some tenacity.

The slashes of sword and claws came from his left and right side. As he dodged through the gap in the centre, daggers pierced the ground as if obstructing his escape.

"Wh... Uwaah!"

Kazuma fell over, startled by the sudden obstacle. As a sword swung toward him, Kazuma rolled over to escape, not caring how dirty his uniform was getting.

When he dragged his tired body to its feet, he found himself near the bench where Terumi was sitting.

"I beg of you... Please do something!"

"Hmm, what should I do~? If you're such a blockhead that you can't get the Azure, then you're of no use to me. Besides, look, fighting isn't my forte."

"You said the opposite a while ago!"

A little while ago, he said that he wasn't much of a thinker.

Terumi chose to tease the frightened Kazuma, as if he had no care in the world about what happened to the boy.

"I said that?"

"You did say it! Whatever, it doesn't matter... Hii!"

His sentence was cut short by the sound of steel cutting the air.

As he screamed and squatted to avoid the attack, three throwing daggers grazed Kazuma's hair and embedded themselves in the bench.

They lodged themselves in the wood right next to Terumi.

If Kazuma's reactions had been any slower, his body might be pinned to the bench right now. It was a terrifying thought.

"Hihhihi. I'm joking, I'm joking. Well, it seems I *would* be a little troubled if you were to die."

Like it wasn't worth the effort, Terumi got up from his seat. His legs having given out from below him, Kazuma looked up at the standing figure of Terumi. "So... Kazuma Kuvaru-kun."

Terumi casually pulled one of the daggers from the bench. He then tossed it over his head and skillfully caught it while looking at Kazuma from under his hood.

"It's not interesting to just help you. I have a condition."

"Wh... What is it?"

"Promise that you'll get the Azure."

His low tone made his voice seem as if it were creeping towards Kazuma.

Catching a glint in Terumi's eye, Kazuma couldn't help but stop breathing.

It wasn't just his breath. Everything felt still for a moment. In the midst of the pause, only Terumi's existence seemed to have meaning.

It felt like staring at a snake. Penetrated by that cold stare, a chill shot down Kazuma's spine. In comparison to Terumi's eyes, his assailants' weapons appeared like toys.

"I-I promise. I mean it. That's why..."

Averting his eyes from the glint directed at him, Kazuma squeezed out his answer. If he didn't answer, he had the feeling that something terrible might happen.

Terumi pulled another knife and grinned.

A fearless and eerie smile.

The cold reptilian gaze shifted from Kazuma towards the black clothed assailants.

"Don't forget those words."

No sooner did he speak than Terumi moved.

He walked between his opponents, and spun the daggers in his hands, as if playing with them.

The black clothed people must have changed their target as they pointed their blades from Kazuma to Terumi. Each of them assumed a fighting stance and approached in cautiously.

The half-beastkin who carried sword went around behind Terumi, and then swung the sharp blade, aiming for his neck.

But at the same time, Terumi turned around and brushed the blade away with his arm. A dull slash could be heard, immediately a black figure leaped right beside Kazuma.

The bench where Terumi had been sitting until a while ago smashed with a loud ringing sound.

"Hiiii!?"

"Ooh. My bad, my bad. Careful, Kazuma-chan."

Instead of pausing, Terumi waved his hand with dagger still in hand.

Currently unable to stand up, Kazuma moved his feeble neck vertically.

"Ye-Yes..."

The answer was the best he could do.

In the meantime, Terumi twisted his body and kicked the one with the claws into the air. Then he jumped and slashed at the chest of the one wielding daggers.

"C'mon c'mon c'mon! Just like this? Hyahhaha! You small fries have to make it more interesting than this! Man, this is boring!"

The bodies that crumpled at his feet were like lumps of shadow. He kicked them like a ball before stomping on them.

Even though it was three against one, Terumi's strength had overwhelmed them.

Without even changing his demeanour or stance, he had managed to counterattack and defeat his unwitting combatants, as if merely giving a light display of his skill.

"Kuh... Move out! Report to Tomonori-sama...!"

As the one who seemed to be the leader raised his voice, the half-beastkins began to pull back. They jumped away before disappearing from the public park.

The vicinity once again regained the tranquility of dusk.

Terumi tossed away the daggers like they were toys he had lost interest with. Then he walked up to the still sitting Kazuma, stretching out his foot and poked him with the leather shoe's tip.

"How long will you keep sitting, Kazuma-chan~. Are your hips giving out?"

"Y... You're really strong, Terumi-san."

Raising his eyes at Terumi who was looking down on him from above, Kazuma spoke with a weak voice that surprised even himself. Terumi's shoulders were shaking as he burst into laughter.

"Strong? You said I'm strong? That's so obvious. Well, you'll eventually get it back though."

"Me? What is it that I'm getting back?"

"Khukuku. Like I said, you'll understand soon enough."

Terumi grabbed Kazuma's arm while laughing and pulled him. He slapped the shoulder of the petrified Kazuma who was still holding his bag tight and made a crescent moon shape with his lips.

"Don't forget the promise."

"Promise..."

"Hey hey, that's not good. Are you pretty much still only half awake?"

The arrogant voice reverberated on Kazuma's willpower.

The grip tightened around Kazuma's arm that was hugging his bag. Forceful, like it was crushing his arm.

"...It's fine. I'm not forgetting about it."

Fooling the Ten Sages' eyes and entering the Cathedral. He had to obtain it.

The Azure that is.

For that purpose, Kazuma was willing to do anything.

Kazuma didn't realize it, but he thought about it as his last resort.

Afterwards, Kazuma and Terumi separated in front of the dormitory.

Terumi stood still in front of the dormitory for a while. Before long, he abruptly looked up over his shoulder.

There was a three story building stood near the dormitory. A figure was standing on the rooftop. The height was short; the long tails were the defining feature, its silhouette emerging, basked in the setting sun.

It was Tomonori.

Standing on the rooftop, Tomonori stared at the dormitory with eyes that were searching for a prey. Until just now, he must have been focusing on the vanishing figure of Kazuma.

He might be waiting for the chance to kill him. Or else, he might be making sure of something.

Either way, it was only an eyesore for Terumi.

Tomonori moved slightly. His large eyes moved for a bit, staring at Terumi who was standing in front of the dormitory.

The distance where they were glaring at each other was somewhat

far. But disregarding such a thing, Terumi and Tomonori were aware of each other's existence and their obvious hostility.

But this time, the distance was not to be shortened. Tomonori turned his heel; and like an olden spy from a faraway island country that was currently in ruin, he became a shadow and disappeared in an instant.

The cat's presence had completely disappeared, yet Terumi glared upward at the uninhabited rooftop.

"...Tch."

He clicked his tongue in annoyance.

Whatever. It had already begun anyway.

The wheel of fate is turning. It can't be stopped anymore even if they struggle.

Part 4

As dinner at the dormitory came to an end, Kazuma went back to his room without speaking to anyone else.

After turning on the lamp in the dark room, he closed the door.

An ordinary room with ordinary furniture. But for Kazuma, it was the most calming place.

Boiling hot water in a small pot, he brewed black tea. It was a poor quality one he bought at a shop in the main street of the island, but it was enough for Kazuma.

After blowing to cool it, he had a sip. And then, he unconsciously sighed.

He had another unpleasant experience today. Although it turned out OK since fortunately he was with Terumi, Kazuma wondered what would have happened if he was alone.

There was something going on with his surroundings lately.

Celica A. Mercury, a beastkin, and Terumi appeared. Today, even half-beastkins also appeared.

And then the Azure.

"Azure..."

He had to think up some kind of a plan.

The Ten Sages were considered to be the most excellent magicians among the Mages' Guild; it was also a social status. If they had to act, it would require an incident with a level that simply couldn’t be resolved by other magicians.

Nonetheless, the one who would initiate the plan was Kazuma.

An incident that couldn't be resolved without the Sages, but also one that Kazuma could cause.

"Dammit... There must be something."

He unconsciously spoke rudely to himself.

Then... a knocking resounded on the room's door.

Kazuma raised his face, frowning. It was quite late. Even disregarding the hour, he had no idea who would come to visit him.

"Yes?"

It might be Terumi, he thought.

But the returned voice from the other side of the door was very different.

"I'm sorry, this is a little sudden. It's Trinity Glassfille."

A voice as sweet as marshmallow. Kazuma couldn't immediately grasp the meaning of the words he had heard. Several seconds of being absent minded later, he hurriedly opened the door.

The figure there made Kazuma stop thinking once more.

Without a doubt, Trinity Glassfille was there.

It was prohibited for girls to visit the boys' dormitory, but such a thing was practically rare.

The spectacle of Trinity, who was famous for her good conduct in the academy, to be alone in the hallway of boys' dormitory felt out of place one way or another.

"Thank good, you're safe."

Looking at Kazuma, Trinity brushed aside the discomfort with a sigh of relief as she began to smile broadly.

"Huh?"

What did she mean by safe? Still with the door open, Kazuma asked the question in return with a surprised and dull face.

Putting both her hands together on her mouth, Trinity bashfully smiled.

"Aah, sorry~. The truth is, this evening, just like when Kazuma-san was attacked before, Nine said that she sensed unusual force... So I thought perhaps something happened to Kazuma-san~."

"And then you went out of your way coming here at this time?"

A truly whimsical person. Kazuma went out to the hallway, amazed.

Fortunately, there wasn't anyone else in the hallway.

Since Kazuma's room was at the far end of the dorm, there shouldn't be anyone passing there to get in the way. But since it was just the two of them there in a secluded place, girl and boy, the circumstances made him feel a little awkward.

"I'm really sorry. But no matter what, it's been on my mind."

As she spoke, Trinity's gentle eyes looked like as if they miraculously saw through everything.

How could it be? Such a thing shouldn't be possible, but it was like the bottom of Kazuma's heart that he hadn't even been aware of was being scooped up. Kazuma confronted her with a forced smile.

"I'm sorry for troubling you. But it's all right. Nothing happened."

Kazuma decided to keep quiet about being attacked by the black clothed people. He felt bad causing further worry to Trinity who somehow couldn't help but felt concerned. Above all, he wanted to avoid a situation where he had to speak about Terumi.

He didn't want unrelated people to know about Terumi and the Azure.

"Is that so? Thank goodness."

Trinity whispered quietly.

After hanging her head for a moment, she reservedly raised her face.

The green eyes affectionately stared at Kazuma.

"Umm~. Kazuma-san."

It was Trinity's sweet voice he had always heard. But there wasn't only sweetness in there. A dignity that seemed to be suppressing the noise of the surroundings was drifting about.

That purity also pulled Kazuma's consciousness as if being prompted gently.

"If you're caught in some kind of trouble, then I'll lend you my strength. So please, don't do anything dangerous."

"Eh...?"

"I don't know anything about the circumstances surrounding you. However... I can't help but feel that there has been some kind of unrest around Kazuma-san these days."

While she said that she didn't know about it, her words totally hit the mark.

Kazuma's heart jumped. But at the same time, various kind of emotions began swirling within him

It was pleasant to receive this kind of genuine care, but it was shameful to be seen helpless like this.

He felt guilty to deceive Trinity from here on. If he were to trick Nine, it would be like he also betrayed Trinity.

He missed the ordinary, inconspicuous dull life of a student and her greetings to him every morning.

If Kazuma's wish were to come true, that same scene wouldn't be there anymore. For a little. Just for a little...

"You needn't worry... about me."

Covering his emotions was too much to handle, Kazuma gently slackened his cheeks.

He had grown used to make a smiling face, but it felt slightly painful when the other party was Trinity. It was like he paid back her pure sincerity with impure deceit.

However, Kazuma continued.

"I didn't particularly get caught up with anything. I have no clue regarding what Trinity-san is speaking of. Certainly, I had a dangerous experience on the other day... but that was all. I'm all right."

TTrinity listened intently without averting her eyes even for a little. Not even a shadow of a doubt appeared on her crystal clear green eyes.

"...I'm relieved to hear about that."

But somehow, her smile appeared to show relief while simultaneously holding sadness, too.

Taking a step backward, Trinity bowed politely in a manner as gentle as her tone of voice.

"I'm glad I summoned my courage to come this far to see you. Thank you for showing your face. Excuse me for coming so late~."

"It's okay. Be careful on your way back, Trinity Glassfille-san."

Trinity bowed her head once more, left a well-mannered smile, and then slowly returned to the hallway.

After seeing off Trinity's leaving figure, Kazuma turned back to his room.

As if snatching his consciousness, the fleeting image of Trinity's seemingly sad smile lingered in his chest.

Did she see through the lie Kazuma had told her? If that was the case, then why didn't she question him?

After closing the door and locking it, Kazuma hit his forehead on the door.

She had come all the way here specially. Why didn't he at least take the small effort to thank her?

"——Hey hey. Don't tell me you just gonna swallow that woman's words?"

From behind Kazuma, a scornful voice jumped at him like cold water.

It was like being snapped out of dream in a single breath. Kazuma turned around with an inconceivable feeling.

There, just like the first time they met, Terumi sat on a wooden chair, acting like he owned the place.

"P-Please don't surprise me. Just where did you come from!?"

His legs gave out from the surprise. With Kazuma's back resting against the door while miserably complaining, Terumi happily laughed while sitting atop the chair.

"Khukuku. I dunno what you mean by that, but it's really funny. I've been here from the beginning."

"But that..."

'Can't be possible', was what going to be his retort; but Kazuma swallowed the words in the middle of it. When Terumi first

appeared, there was never any common notice.

If Terumi was saying it, then perhaps he truly had been in this room from the very beginning. But Kazuma just didn't notice it.

For some reason, the air around Terumi gave an impression like that.

After separating his back from the door, Kazuma walked slowly before sitting down on the edge of his bed.

Before he knew it, Terumi was drinking the black tea he brewed some time ago. It would have become lukewarm anyway, so Kazuma didn't feel like making the effort to take it back.

"What did you mean when you said not to swallow Trinity-san's words?"

Joining his hands together on the opened gap between his knees, Kazuma looked at Terumi.

Both parties eyes were concealed, Kazuma's by his long bangs and Terumi's by his hood. But strangely, their sights clashed spontaneously.

Terumi, holding the cup by hooking it with his fingers, drained its contents.

"I told you not to just swallow it, right? But... was she called Trinity? Well, it doesn't matter. Do you think it's really okay to trust that woman?"

"Why would you say that? She's just worried about me."

Unable to comprehend the meaning of Terumi's words, Kazuma irritatedly criticized Terumi.

Looking amazed, Terumi exaggeratedly shook his head while talking in a sympathetic tone of voice.

"Oh man, you poor, poor thing. You've been living a lukewarm life in this ignorant, peaceful island. But I guess it can't be helped.

Stupid people will get taken advantage of, used, and dumped in the end, y'know?"

"What are you trying to say...?"

Kazuma became uneasy. Terumi gave his usual smile while returning to his usual tone of voice to explain.

"You really don't notice? That woman is monitoring you."

Monitoring.

The unexpected word froze Kazuma's thoughts.

Terumi rudely put back the cup to desk. The coarse noise made Kazuma return to breathing.

But he simply couldn't go back to being calm.

"Monitoring... Trinity-san... monitoring me?"

"Who else is there?"

"But why..."

"You don't have any idea? Really? Even one? ...Really?"

Terumi's voice fueled the suspicion that began to grow in Kazuma. The gradually growing suspicion grew larger as if he would find something if he searched the memories of the past few days.

"Remember... *Kazuma Kuvaru*."

Terumi's words shook his mind.

The awfully sharp gaze of Nine who was cautious around Kazuma. Those eyes that were like they were groping for Kazuma's innermost thoughts one-by-one. She was one of the Ten Sages after all. It wouldn't be a miracle even if she guessed something.

And then Trinity. Inside that undiscriminating and tender smile she wore, what kind of face did she have? She was hidden in Nine's shadow, but she was the excellent Platinum the Trinity.

"Trinity-san is... monitoring me..."

It wasn't like his muttering was directed at anyone, but Kazuma acknowledged it. It spread on his heart in a flash. The gratitude and obligation he held toward Trinity until now were dyed in black.

It was hard to believe.

However... was it possible to say that there was absolutely zero chance of her giving such harmless smile while monitoring every single of Kazuma's move?

While casting his eyes down with his intertwined fingers biting the back of his hands, Kazuma held a distinct suspicion.

Chapter 4: Doubt of Yellow Equilibrium

Part 1

It was deep in a remote forest.

Excluding the people who lived there, no one knew about it.

In this place, there was a small village.

The people who lived there weren't humans. They were beastkins... To be exact, cat-type beastkins whose ancestors hailed from the now defunct Japan.

The inhabitants already slept as the night had grown long. With fires burning at the village's periphery to repel wild animals, the crackling of the orange flames played during the stillness like an instrument.

In the basement below a small building inside the village, there he was.

The room, which was surrounded by stone wall, was unpleasantly cold; it was covered in complete darkness. Walking with a lit lantern, only him and his immediate surroundings were wrapped in the warm, faint light.

On the walls that were almost assimilated within the darkness, the silhouette of a short person was swaying.

Even if it was a human, it was only the height of a child. However, there were large, triangular ears on top of its head and a long tail which was split in to two parts protruding from its back. It was the cat-type beastkin with grey fur, Tomonori.

With silent footsteps he advanced inside, only the flickering fire in

the lantern marked his progress.

Arriving at the inner part of the room, Tomonori stopped. He placed the lantern he held aside.

A flat, lengthy box made of paulownia wood was enshrined there. For a several seconds, Tomonori stared at it, and then he gently broke the seal.

Inside it was a single sword. Compared with the pair of short swords Tomonori usually handled, the sword was larger by far.

It was sheathed in black scabbard and sealed tightly by the sword strap.

Tomonori grabbed the sword. As if severing his intense hesitation, he took it out from the box.

"...What do you want?"

With the sword hanging in the air, Tomonori suddenly spoke.

That inquiry was directed to the presence behind him.

He could tell it was there by the smell, he didn't need to look.

The presence was looking at Tomonori's back from the entrance of the small, hidden, underground room. The unmoving figure had similar profile in silhouette, another male cat-type beastkin. He had white fur with tawny spots; a two-tone pattern.

His name was Mitsuyoshi. He was Tomonori's older brother.

"What're ya plannin' to do with that?"

Without entering into the room, Mitsuyoshi asked with calm voice.

This room was hiding things considered important for the village; a room dedicated for safekeeping. Both trespassing without reason and removing any of the objects housed within violated the village's laws.

While it was a scene in which normally Tomonori would be chastised, Mitsuyoshi didn't raise his voice. Continuing with his previous pretext, he asked again.

"Ya know what kind of sword that is, right?"

"...Time-Killing Sword
Hihi'irokane
."

Hihi'irokane

It was an powerful sword that when wielded, held the power not just to cut flesh, but also eventually sever the target's spirit.

However, this sword wasn't just that kind of object.

It had existed for many years. Tomonori and Mitsuyoshi's clan had been handing it down for generations.

Until six years ago, Tomonori and the others had been living in a mountain village in Japan. Likewise, the mountain village was passed down in the old days. Compared to this village, far larger number of cat-type beastkins had lived there.

However, that way of life had been cut short by the Black Beast.

In order to defend the old village, many of the clan's warriors challenged the Black Beast, and fell. Because of the large-scale nuclear strike, the old village's mountain was gone, burnt and demolished.

Tomonori and the other cat-type beastkins parted with many of their brethren as they made their escape to the continent. Here, they had been building a small village while living quietly.

Someday, they would regain the peaceful land from those days once more and restore the undying long history.

He strongly believed so.

"That's the treasure of our clan, its foundation... an' our old village's

symbol."

Mitsuyoshi spoke quietly like the engraved shadow in the room.

Just as it had been when they were living in the now destroyed old village, this sword had been taken care of. Among the villagers, this sword was believed to be the old village's symbol. The number of people who survived the days of despair while holding onto that belief wasn't small.

Still gripping his clan's old village's sword, Tomonori dropped his arm to the side of his body.

Without looking back at his older brother, he replied in a stiff voice.

"...Wherever the clan lives, that's home. The sword is a weapon. And a weapon... has a role."

"What's the role of that fellow?"

"To cut the evil that threatens the world."

"What's the evil that threatens the world?"

"The man I must kill."

There was no hesitation in his answer. Tomonori's gaze moved to the sword he held. Different from his short swords, it emphasized its presence heavily.

Hihi'irokane. A sword beyond all definitions of space-time that could also sever spirit.

"This sword is required to kill that guy. If not this sword... it won't mean a thing."

The words of his younger brother hinted an awfully strong determination, Mitsuyoshi's eyes narrowed, as if he was weighing Tomonori's intention.

"...This ain't Clavis' instruction, is it?"

Tomonori answered with cold, unwavering voice.

"Of course not. This is my will."

"If ya act at yer own convenience, you'll lose somethin' equally big. Surely ya understand, right?"

"I'm not Clavis' servant."

Mitsuyoshi was righteousness. Tomonori was faith.

It appeared their words indicated and matched the resolution they abided in their heart.

It had been this way for a long time. Mitsuyoshi and Tomonori couldn't understand each other. Each was aware of the burden that was decided for the other and respected the other's feelings, but still, they couldn't live in the same way.

They had been aware of their differences for so long.

Therefore, Mitsuyoshi knew well that he wouldn't be able to sway his brother's faith no matter what kind of words he used. Undoubtedly, he himself possessed something that couldn't be distorted, just like Tomonori.

"...Tomonori. Ya goin' alone?"

"Of course."

"But yer opponent is the kind that makes ya need to get Hihi'irokane. Ya still doin' it?"

"I don't need any hindrance."

Tomonori's reply was cold. But inside his mind, there were the figures of half-beastkins who had been on many missions along with him as his subordinates.

They were incomplete people. Not human, or beastkin to say either. They were rejected mixed breed who didn't belong to any society.

Having no place to go, Tomonori aided them while Mitsuyoshi resolved to shelter them. Since then, the protected half-beastkins worked as Tomonori's subordinates, fighting alongside him.

If they were aware that Tomonori went alone, they would most likely grieve. However.

"...If I take them along, those guys will lose their lives."

Tomonori whispered it, as if talking to himself.

No matter what their appearance was, no matter what their race was, they were living because they had been born. Especially since the half-beastkins never knew peace and weren't permitted to establish as a species.

He himself must not have been a good leader. Even so, he couldn't bring himself to involve their lives in his selfishness.

"There's no time. You too, you mustn't been planning to loiter in a place like this."

Tomonori turned on his heel as if to shake something off.

Mitsuyoshi slightly twitched the tip of his nose.

During this time, Mitsuyoshi also had a different duty. It was to investigate that person.

The target of his investigation was Relius Clover. The man whose records Clavis tracked had something to do with the appearance of the Black Beast.

"If you're going to try to assist me, I don't need your help. This is my path."

After that last sentence, Tomonori started walking with sword and lantern in hand. Although he noticed his older brother's figure on the edge of his vision, he didn't focus on it.

There was another thing that he should focus on. He had that kind of expression.

"Tomonori."

Mitsuyoshi spoke while they were passing each other.

Mitsuyoshi also didn't take a better look at his younger brother. As if yielding to the room's entrance, he leant his back on the wall, staring at the empty paulownia box which stored a sword until a while ago.

"Since ya made up yer mind, I won't stop ya. So definitely... bring him down."

"...That is my role."

Definitely, whatever the outcome would be.

He would kill that man.

Holding killing intent and a sense of duty that were like blades in his chest, Tomonori through the dead of night towards Ishana.

Part 2

Today, Ishana was blessed again with fine weather.

Class had ended. Picking up his bag and turning to leave, Kazuma looked out of the window in the hallway.

From there the academy's courtyard could be seen clearly. What Kazuma was looking was a small building peeking from the opposite side of the thick bushes and large trees, the Cathedral.

There, the Mage's Guild's highly classified information was stored. Amongst it, there was information related to the *Azure*.

The more he thought about it, his thoughts toward the Azure grew stronger.

(Cathedral... Cathedral...)

Resting his elbows on the window frame, Kazuma viewed the Cathedral while biting his thumb.

What would be the best way to get in there? Be it waking or sleeping, it was all he could think about.

Since it had come to that, he had found signs of tenacity within himself. It was the first time he had experienced obsession.

"What are you looking at~?"

Trinity's gentle voice floated from behind. Kazuma turned around quite smoothly.

"Just looking outside. I was thinking that the weather is nice."

While answering Trinity's gentle smiling face with a forced smile,

Kazuma secretly took a breath.

Was her attitude the same as always toward him? That thought made him worried.

Terumi's words resounded in his mind.

——*That woman is monitoring you, get it?*

(Trinity-san is monitoring... me...?)

If that's the case, the greeting just now might be a part of the monitoring.

It was like he was wearing a mask. While the mask on the surface showed a smile, underneath it was a face that paid attention to Trinity's every movement searching for any fault, any difference.

"It seems so. The weather is so nice that it brightens the mood~."

"Yes, exactly."

His mouth fluently let out cheap words. Despite that, inside his chest he was filled with suspicion, he weaved conversation like he was the same friend as he had been until yesterday.

Not showing any sign of doubt toward Kazuma's distrust, Trinity pulled her chin a bit and straightened herself again.

"Umm, Kazuma-san. Do you have any plans this afternoon?"

"Plans?"

While putting on a casual voice, Kazuma secretly frowned beneath his bangs.

Why was Trinity asking about his plana? The snake of suspicion, which had been coiling on the bottom of his stomach, raised its head.

"No, I don't have any particular plans. I'm just going to return to the dorm."

He didn't actually have any plans, but he answered carefully to not give even a slight chance.

But Trinity turned shy while looking delighted, and then she narrowed her clear green eyes.

"If so, is it okay if I invite you?"

"...Huh?"

It was unexpected words. Kazuma couldn't understand her meaning and asked again in dull tone of voice.

Trinity's shoulders shook as she chuckled. Even now, her soft laughing voice was like the fragrance of sugar and flowers drifting about.

"Like I said, it's an invitation. If you don’t mind, Can we have tea together?"

"By tea... Are you inviting me to drink tea?"

"Yes."

Trinity nodded gently.

Kazuma's eyes began to wander as he weighed up his answer.

He couldn't make sure of Trinity's true intention. He could follow as much as her listening to his plans in order to monitor his movements. But as to the extent after that, there shouldn't be any significance unless she wanted to restrict her target's freedom. If she didn't do so, then she wouldn't be able to investigate where he was going and what he did.

No. Trinity's monitoring was probably not to investigate Kazuma's actions, but might be to restrain them. If that was the case...

"Umm, are you unwilling to accept it?"

As Trinity's voice snapped him back to reality, Kazuma hurriedly pulled a smile.

It would be suspicious to refuse the tea invitation immediately after replying he had no plans.

Kazuma quickly shook his head.

"No, absolutely not. I was just a bit surprised. It's because I never considered receiving an invitation to take tea with someone like Trinity Glassfille-san."

"Fufu. Actually, me too."

With the hand that wasn't holding her bag, Trinity touched her rosy cheek.

"I felt a little nervous to invite a man, even if he's a friend."

"What do you... mean by that?"

As he expected, he couldn't grasp her intention. Toward Kazuma who inadvertently had a questioning look, this time, Trinity put the hand which had been on her cheek to her mouth and let out a short laugh.

"It's a secret~."

"Secret? But..."

"Okay then. Now that it's decided, let's go. The other two should have already gone ahead."

With sweet fragrance drifting about, Trinity tenderly held Kazuma's hand. She pulled him along, gently urging him forward.

"Wha-, wait, Trinity-san...?"

Even as he voiced his confusion, Trinity only gave cheerful smile.

He could escape if he shook off her hand. That option came to mind, but he couldn't do it.

Suddenly, they faced the entrance after descending the stairs. Kazuma frowned thinking of a question which was different from

the other questions he had so far.

Just now, did Trinity say... 'the other two'?

"So... Why am I here..."

After his mind finally calmed down again, Kazuma showed a stiff smile while feeling compelled to complain.

Trinity had dragged Kazuma by the arm and brought him to a solitary café which was just off the main street of the island.

The store had charming appearance with bricks decorated on a white wall. Surrounding the entrance were a numbers of planters holding colorful flowers. Identical, the interior also had white walls with irregular brick-like tiles as ornaments; the area by the windows enshrined with brightly colored potted flowers.

The guests and employees in the store were all female. Kazuma was the only exception.

"Why? Isn't it because I took you here?"

While putting a sugar cube in a very white royal milk tea, Trinity gently smiled across the table at him.

There were two other persons sat beside Kazuma who helped to encircle the round table.

To his left was a person wearing a huge smile having chosen a nutty caramel cake and a lemon tea. It was Celica.

On his right, Nine was sitting with a chocolate cake, which looked sweet, and a hot coffee.

Unexpectedly 'having tea' was exactly the opposite of calming as

Kazuma felt a tense atmosphere flowing about.

By the way, there was a dish of rare cheese cake beside Trinity's royal milk tea; but in front of Kazuma, there was a straight and baked cheese cake placed.

"No, I didn't mean that. Err... Why was I invited to drink tea with Trinity-san and the others?"

He felt extremely out of place. If it hadn't been an invitation from Trinity, he would suspect it as a tasteless harassment.

While stirring her light colored tea with a spoon, Trinity meekly smiled.

"Since you looked down recently, I thought a change of pace might help~. I don't know what a man would prefer, so I'm sorry if you don't like our usual spot..."

"That's... all?"

Smoldering suspicion made Kazuma ask again.

Trinity put her fingers on her cheeks and thought a little.

"After all you've been through... I thought that having a tasty cake would be nice. Ah. Perhaps this is bothering you?"

"N-Not at all. Ha, haha..."

As if Trinity's worried face suddenly noticed, Kazuma laughed to cover it up.

(Only worried...? It can't only just be that.)

Trinity was supposed to monitor Kazuma. Probably at the instruction of Nine.

But as if relieved by Kazuma's answer, there was affection shown in Trinity's relaxed eyes which would be unthinkable to direct at a monitored target.

Trinity was always gentle. Not only Kazuma, everyone who knew her must feel it. It was unimaginable to think there was a lie in her affection. ...He didn't want to consider it if he could.

(But...)

Terumi had told him.

He couldn't fathom it. Kazuma put stirred his tea even though he hadn't taken any sugar.

Suddenly his hand stiffened.

Beyond his gaze as he inadvertently raised it, Nine's fingers, which were beautiful to the nails, were hooked round a small handle. Without even the slightest hesitation, she raised the milk pitcher for her coffee to the sky and slowly turned it upside down in one go, pouring the milk into her cup, down to the last drop.

And then one-by-one, she dropped in the sugar cubes which were provided on the table. The contents of the bowl that held the lumps decreased in the blink of an eye.

"...Umm."

Unintentionally, the confusion went out as a voice.

Suffice it to say that Nine didn't speak with friendly voice, she gave Kazuma a sharp look.

"What?"

"Oh, no. Nothing..."

Any answer would be good. When Kazuma's mouth stiffened as he desperately tried to think of something, Celica called a passing waitress.

"Excuse me, can I have gum syrup?"

"Ah, yes. I'll get it right away."

Kazuma was at a loss for words.

Without any resistance, the female waitress brought a small pitcher filled with gum syrup. Naturally it was placed in front of Nine; and naturally, Nine put it into her coffee.

Not a single drop remained of course.

Presently, the coffee inside her white cup had been transformed into something murky white from which a sweet aroma oozed; the water level went up to the rim, almost spilling.

As if it couldn't possibly spill, Nine began stirring it with a spoon.

(...Seriously?)

Kazuma slowly put his hand to his mouth.

It wasn't that Kazuma disliked sweets. However, this was an exception. It was otherworldly.

Celica cheerfully laughed when she discovered that Kazuma was petrified by Nine's shocking behavior.

"Ahaha. Surprised? Onee-chan unexpectedly has a sweet tooth."

"Sweet tooth..."

Kazuma got very uneasy thinking about whether it was okay to dismiss so casually as a sweet tooth. But he thought that he should stop arguing about that here as he had no ally in this.

Celica, Trinity, and even the waitress who brought gum syrup accepted it because it was a common scene.

"This particular amount should be normal. Don't worry, I'm doing it properly."

Nine spoke as if nothing happened, all while raising the cup with astonishing sense of balance.

(It's absolutely not normal! There's no meaning if the coffee's flavor

is gone, is there!)

As he endured his desire to let his voice out, Kazuma could only give a feeble smile.

Trinity added a few words as if to deliver the final blow.

"When Nine's feeling tired, she drinks things like gum syrup directly, you know. When does that, she says her head starts working properly again~."

"...Haa, my head..."

He couldn't comprehend what a genius could do. Kazuma came to that conclusion in his innermost thoughts.

"See, rather than the dorm, Onee-chan and I live in a house on the island. The house is in this neighborhood. That's why we often come here on the way back from academy just to have tea. Since we do it all the time, we're known to the shop's staff."

Seemingly enjoying herself, Celica, while smiling wryly, bent towards Kazuma and looked at him as if telling a secret.

Kazuma backed up about twice the distance she approached him.

"O... ooh. I-I see."

Almost reflexively, he averted his eyes. He wasn't very good at being stared at.

Besides, it just be a feeling, but since the time Celica began sitting beside him, indescribable fear had assaulted him. As discomfort crawled up his spine to the back of his neck, he could feel nausea just by swallowing his saliva.

Of course, it wasn't because of what had been done to Nine's coffee.

Not noticing Kazuma's bad shape, Celica pierced a fork to her cake and stuff her cheek with a mouthful. Firmly closing her eyes and grasping the fork tightly, she groaned happily.

"Mmm~, delicious. Kazuma-san, you should try some, c'mon. The cake and tea is reaaaaally tasty."

Celica urged him to try his cake and tea, which he had not yet touched, with her sparkling eyes.

Beside her, Trinity wrapped her cheeks in both of her hands and was taken aback as she looked at Kazuma.

"Could it be~, you dislike sweet food? My apologies~."

"No, not at all. I like it. I was just puzzled by the situation just now... I'll eat now, then."

Kazuma smiled while struggling with an intense feeling of exhaustion, it felt as if he might collapse. Hooking his fingers round his cup, he drank the pleasantly fragrant tea.

It did taste good.

But Surrounding Kazuma there were still those three. Nine who held a drink that he wasn't sure was even coffee anymore while looking shooting daggers in his direction. Celica who strangely made him feel sick just by being nearby. And Trinity who was possibly monitoring him.

As he was 'having tea' while surrounded by them, it was like he didn't have the proper feeling to enjoy the tea's taste. The poor quality tea he drank in his room was very much more relaxing.

(Really, how did this come to happen...)

Presently in this baffling situation, Kazuma didn't even know what kind of expression would be good to make.

Part 3

Leaving the dumbfounded Kazuma alone, the girls' tea party was lively with a succession of trifling conversations.

"...See, since it's just my class that got poor average grade, we have to take a retest."

While taking a piece of her sister's cake, Celica, who seemed to be sulking, judging by the pout on her lips, told them about what happened during today's class.

As Nine brushed her glossy hair which spilled over from her shoulders to her back, she looked at Celica with caring eyes that were completely different from the eyes that she directed at Kazuma.

"How could that happen? You can't get a failing grade. Is your class all right?"

"Aah~, but I'm also poor at lightning magic. Since it makes a reaaally loud noise, I get frightened."

As Trinity talked with a strained smile, Celica nodded repeatedly like she understood. Then, her expression suddenly went cheerful.

"Ah, even so, I'm considerably skilled in levitation. I can't jump high, but I'm the best in my class in flying long distance."

"The thought of you using levitation... somehow disturbs me. It's not just flying slowly like you think, you know."

In response to Celica, the cloudy looking Nine put the coffee-like substance to her mouth.

Celica giggled in girlish voice.

"Oh no, Onee-chan. Since there's the Mages' Guild's barrier, I can't get out from the island no matter how high I fly."

"Don't talk like that..."

"Ah, but."

Despite her appalled older sister, Celica suddenly changed the topic while putting her index finger to her chin.

"It's no good if levitation doesn't use broom. It's weird."

"But isn't it romantic to get on a broom to fly in the sky~?"

Joining both her hands together, Trinity spoke as if she was seeing a dream.

Kazuma just continued to eat while watching the scene unfold.

It seemed the center of conversation was always Celica.

Nine listened affectionately to her sister while Trinity occasionally chimed in.

The three of them must be close. He had thought that from the first time he met Celica, but he felt it again while sitting, watching the girls together now.

Around him, all the women in the cafe seemed to be having friendly conversations. He was witnessing the other sex in their element.

Scooping another bite of cake, Kazuma stole a glance at Trinity.

As for Trinity, she was engrossed in talking without looking in Kazuma's direction. If this was what she called monitoring, then she was very much a lacking schemer.

(Just what is the meaning of this...)

He couldn't properly taste the flavor of the cake anymore.

(In case...)

The spectacle was too much of an everyday scene, but it gave birth to a tiny assumption in Kazuma's mind.

What if everything was a misunderstanding?

If Terumi's was incorrect and she wasn't monitoring him, then there would be no deceit in Trinity's kindness, Nine's displeasure was only prejudice, and the discomfort he got when Celica was around was a simply poor physical condition.

What if the Azure itself was just an illusion?

If that was the case, he must have been some kind of fool.

Dreaming of illusions and questioning the hand which was reaching out to him. He had been spending his time and effort on obsession and suspicion.

If it was just as he suspected, then maybe the ordinary, peaceful, and harmonious life he was in didn't exist. That didn't mean it was filled with nought but boredom; more like... admiring other people's affairs while living like ordinary people would.

If now... he forgot about the Azure, then just like his memories from over seven years ago, the past he wished to recover at all cost and the matter about the Cathedral would slip into obscurity.

The same as it had been until now, but also completely different.

He felt that he would like to set foot in that kind of academy life.

"...Kazuma-san? Kazuma-saaan?"

"Eh... Ah, yes?"

At Celica's voice, Kazuma raised his face while still gripping his fork tightly.

It seemed he had become engrossed in his own thoughts and lost awareness of his surroundings. Kazuma scratched his cheek while showing an embarrassed smile.

"Sorry. Since I'm not too familiar with this place, I got dazed just now."

"Aha, I see. Hmm, looks like the shop is a little too cute for a man..."

Next to Celica who spoke like a child, a laugh that was like faint rustling of clothes resounded.

"Dazed, huh."

Nine interrupted with a tone of voice like she was looking for something. A bewitching but also scheming voice; unsuitable for the atmosphere of the pleasant conversation which had been going on until now.

"I wonder. Haven't you been doing some thinking?"

"Some thinking?"

Celica asked while bending her head slightly to one side, confused by the shift in tone. But Nine didn't answer her sister.

Resting her chin on her hands elegantly, she crossed her long legs. Her gaze was fixed and sharp; she stared at Kazuma as if she was concentrating hard.

"Nowadays, it seems the academy's Great Library has been your favorite place. Are you investigating something?"

The brief comment that was disguised in a neutral tone of voice made tension run up Kazuma's nape.

Nine knew. She knew that for two whole days, Kazuma had skipped classes to investigate something.

How did she know about that? The most obvious way would be that she had heard about it from Trinity after she met him in the Library.

Trinity informed Nine. Probably also about the matter Kazuma was investigating... Perhaps also about when he said he wanted to look at the Mages' Guild's highly classified information.

He had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

He shouldn't let his guard down. He mustn't display any weakness. The girls weren't his allies. His suspicions had been aroused once again.

As if she saw through it, Nine's eyes became narrow.

"Have you found the information you desire?"

"...No. Unfortunately, I didn't find it."

Kazuma made an unambitious wry smile. He tried as hard as he could to display a smile that contained no ill will and seemed harmless.

"You were looking for something which can't be found in the academy's library?"

Nine insistently questioned him.

Perhaps, she was waiting for Kazuma to make an unpleasant face. Thinking she was going for that, Kazuma of course replied with a gentle face.

"Since I don't usually make use of places like the library, perhaps my method of searching is bad. Granted, I've given up already."

"Oh?"

Raising her eyebrows, Nine seemed to still have something on her mind.

Before she could put it into words, Kazuma shifted the topic.

"Come to think of it, I've heard about him thanks to my search, but Nine-san and Celica-san are Professor Shuuichirou Ayatsuki's daughters, aren't you."

Shuuichirou Ayatsuki was a world-famous professor who had made many appearances in books on alchemy. His primary research was fusing alchemy and science; and establishing a soul in objects.

During the spare time in his investigation, Kazuma checked up about Nine, who was strangely wary of him, on the Great Library's computer which held the student records.

He had found that Celica's formal name was Celica A. Mercury. From there, he ended up finding she was related to Shuuichirou Ayatsuki.

The topic Kazuma raised had a larger effect than he thought. Instantly, Nine's expression turned to anger.

Her face contorted in hatred, Nine informed him in low voice.

"That man isn't my parent. We're unrelated."

With that brief comment, he completely understood what Nine thought about her father.

He also understood Celica's thought as she turned to face her older sister, holding her father in contrasting thought.

"Don't say sad things like that, Onee-chan."

Rather than a rebuke, it was more accurate to say it was a pout.

However, Nine didn't back down. She snorted, dismissing it, and then sipped her coffee to swallow the unpleasant feelings that were welling up in her.

"You should cut that out. Forget about that man. He hasn't been there since the beginning."

"Of course he wasn't able to do that. He's our father, you know? Yes, he couldn't be together with us... but even so, he's our one and only father!"

Celica clutched both her hands into fists not willing to back down, Nine became even more irritated.

"Quit calling that man father!"

"I won't. After all, he's my father! Onee-chan's, too. Why do you say

such bad things about Father!?"

"It's better for you not to know!"

"You always quickly say that! Not fair!"

With incredible speed, the atmosphere became weird.

The store interior suddenly became noisy because of the argument. Other customers were beginning to watch the scene.

Unable to just watch, Trinity leaned forward.

"Nine, Celica-san. We're in a shop..."

As if to interrupt the chiding voice, Celica and Nine stood up at the same time.

"I' only thinking of your best interests, Celica!"

"It's just for your own convenience!"

A loud noise rang out as the furious sisters' hands simultaneously hit the table.

...Then, the force so greatly shook the table that the saucer of Trinity's cup flipped into the air.

From there on, time extremely flowed slowly.

Following the floating plate, a white cup went up in the air. The cup's body was turning while its path slowly drew a parabola...

A wet noise faintly echoed. Next, the sound of china smashing was heard as the cup fell over the table.

Dead silence fell inside the shop.

Nine and Celica stood still, both stiff of face.

Beyond the girls' gaze was Trinity who remained still while in the middle of rising.

Platinum blonde hair of a noble princess from a fairy tale. Hood of a witch. White skin of a fairy. Trinity's round glasses and thefront of her white uniform were soaked with the spilled tea.

From the edge of her lenses, drips of royal milk tea fell to the table.

"...My glasses, have been stained."

Trinity slowly stood up. She took out a handkerchief and wiped her glasses.

"Nine. Celica-san."

The voice she used to softly call them was gentle and kind. But for some reason, Kazuma's spine froze even though he was only listening.

"I have something to tell you."

Kazuma didn't raise his face so he couldn't see what was inside the smiling Trinity's gaze as she spoke.

But as for Nine and Celica whom he stared at one after another, they became pale as if they had seen something incredibly frightening. Without saying anything, they sat down after witnessing it.

Because it was frightening, he didn't have the nerve to check it.

It was an odd spectacle.

"...do so. Okay? Affection and consideration. Lacking them is really sad for a human being. Not only the people you're together with every day, but also to nature and objects near you. Don't forget to act kind to them."

Celica and Nine were apologizing while listening to Trinity's speech which went on endlessly.

Celica aside, to see Nine bow her head and apologize was really unbelievable for Kazuma. Konoe Mercury was apologizing. None of his classmates would believe it if he told them.

Trinity's speech continued still.

At first it was a talk about glasses which help a lot of people with bad eyesight every day. However, the topic gradually shifted to how our ancestors struggled until they invented transparent glass, then jumped to the hardships of people who delivered materials to the island, and then finally to being careful with objects.

The tone she used to talk was gentle all the way. Consequently, it seemed like listening to sermon in a church.

But Nine and Celica, still sitting bolt upright, bowed their heads like scolded children. They didn't attempt to object in any way.

The girls must have known. About what would happen if they stoked the fires of Trinity's anger further.

And the extent of that menace was thoroughly transmitted just from the sisters' frightened complexions.

Kazuma turned away from the girls, deciding that it would be impossible to interrupt now, lest he accidentally involve himself in the scolding.

Without further ado, Kazuma ignored the lecture, whose end was yet to be seen, while quietly drinking his tea.

(Aah, I want to go home...)

He swallowed the involuntarily vocalised thought, along with his tea.

At that moment, Kazuma's gaze was snatched away by the scenery outside of the window as he casually looked toward it.

Outside the store, on the opposite side of the road, a man wearing a hood low over his eyes was standing.

Despite how out of place he looked against the plain scenery, let alone people inside the store, even the people out on the street didn't bat an eyelid at him.

As if he could be seen only by Kazuma, Terumi stood there, watching.

Suddenly, Terumi moved. While calmly starting to walk, he jerked his chin to invite Kazuma.

Lured by that gesture, Kazuma quietly rose to his feet.

"Oh? Kazuma-san?"

Pausing her lecture, Trinity, who was in front of him, called him.

On reflex, Kazuma gave a smile and began to speak.

"Excuse me, I happened to notice an acquaintance. I'll return soon."

Not speaking more after it, Kazuma grabbed the bag at his feet and hurriedly rushed out of the store.

He took a detour from the shop and searched for Terumi. He was already gone from the spot where he had been standing, but Kazuma saw the hem of his long coat just as it disappeared round a street corner.

A loud thump resounded.

Just as he witnessed Terumi's figure, he got a feeling that the blurred world turned clear. It was like the figure that should have been inside him came back.

If he didn't run after him, if he didn't catch up with him.

For the first time in living memory, Kazuma ran with full speed. An unbelievably uplifting feeling rose inside his chest.

Part 4

A beautiful sunset illuminated the townscape. At the same time, it also engraved distinct shadows.

Pushing his way through the two-tone coloring of bitter orange and black, Kazuma was dead set on running.

Out of the main street and deeper into the island.

As Kazuma strayed down paths he ad never walked before, he seemed confused, like he was going into an unrecognized other world, because of the intense and sinister colouring.

Ahead of his gaze was always a flickering, retreating figure.

The fluttering hem of long jacket that was like a mantle. The hood that covered the hair and face. Slender shoulders with long, thin legs which were like a silhouette.

Terumi was walking. His steps were long, but his strides were not as fast as Kazuma's sprint.

Despite that, even when Kazuma ran and panted countlessly, it was like the distance between them didn't get any shorter.

It was like a dream. Even if he ran and struggled, he would never catch up with the person in front of him. As if he was being left behind in this new discolored world; the feeling of frustration was tearing off his chest.

Just what was this place? The scenery moving past the edge of his vision didn't feel familiar to Kazuma at all.

There was nobody. The scattered buildings were small. There was no likelihood that people were living here.

Ishana was by no means a large island, but he never knew there was a place like this. The same was also true for this silent, deserted road.

Before long, the buildings disappeared with the townscape. Terumi pushed his way through bushes, going even further inside.

The bushes surrounded the town like walls; it became like a thick forest. The trees were reinforcing the island's magic. A forest dedicated to reinforce the barrier that was covering the island.

Proceeding through it, he moved out of the shallow forest and finally arrived up to the edge of the island. There, Kazuma at had at last stopped walking.

The untamed land here was a rugged rocky area. On the other side of it, a calm horizon could be seen. The frail roar of waves was heard; feeble ripples collided with rocks and split open fragilely.

In the past, the waves had been more powerful. But six years ago, because of the large scale nuclear attack intended to kill Black Beast, the world had changed; the wind declined and the waves grew weak.

Because his life only involved going back and forth between the academy and dormitory, he didn't see the sea very often. But as he gazed at the heavily silent sea, it was a stark reminder of the island's isolation from the outside world.

Terumi placed his hands on a noticeably large rock and faced Kazuma, waiting for him.

"Yoo~, Kazuma-chan. Why are you wandering around here? Got lost?"

He spoke as if comforting a stray dog.

Wheezing, Kazuma tried to control his strained and disturbed breath while giving Terumi a bitter look.

"Wrong... I saw you walking... before..."

It was like he was doing it on purpose, thought Kazuma. Terumi should have known he was following from the start. The fact that he walked with a speed at which Kazuma could never catch up must have also been on purpose. Though, Kazuma couldn't comprehend on how he could walk that fast.

With a playful gesture, Terumi put held up his hands at chest height as if showing he surrendered.

"Hey, hey, hey. Don't give me such a rebellious look. I'm your reassuring ally, right~?"

"...I know that. That's why I chased you, isn't it."

Even though his shoulders were heaving furiously, Kazuma straightened up his body.

Without him noticing, his surroundings gradually grew darker as the sun sank in the west. The stars in the sky weren't visible. It wasn't possible to see them through the cloud of seithr surrounding the island's barrier.

Seithr... an unknown substance spread over the world at the same time as the appearance of the Black Beast six years ago. Even though he didn't want to get close to the border line with the outside world, he could actually sense the peaceless world.

Kazuma shifted his attention from the sea back towards Terumi.

"Anyway, don't we have some kind of business? Why did you even come so far out?"

"Why, why, why. You're that stupid, huh."

"Terumi-san...!"

"Kukkuku, don't be so impatient. I'll show you some really nice stuff."

Terumi spoke as if Kazuma was being ungrateful. It was like he was amazed at Kazuma's short temper.

'The one who should be amazed is me', Kazuma wanted to tell Terumi, but he let it pass. It was a waste of time to confront Terumi here.

"Look. It's this thing"

Quite sloppy compared to the time when he teased Kazuma. Terumi poked inside the shade of a rock with his tiptoe. What hit Terumi's toe was the barrier covering Ishana.

That moment, Kazuma gulped.

Just next to Terumi's foot, several sheets of paper stuck on the air. To be accurate, the papers were sticking to the barrier. The five sheets were arranged in a pattern, as if drawing a pentagon.

The passage surrounded by the papers was so large that a single kid could pass through... Amazingly, a hole had opened in the barrier like it was cut off cleanly there.

"Those cat bastards seem to have opened it. It seems that's because there's no other way to get into the island, as one would expect."

Sneering, Terumi raised the edges of his lips.

As for Kazuma, he began to mutter with trembling voice.

"Wha... What do you mean... by this."

Was it a good thing for such a thing to exist? The barrier covering Ishana didn't just prevent any physical interference from other countries; it also played a role in blocking the seithr that was drifting in the atmosphere.

The Black Beast only appeared in places that had seithr.

Ishana was rejecting seithr itself.

For this reason, it was the safest city in the world. Therefore, it was illegal for the barrier to be torn.

"Oh no, if I don't quickly notify them...!"

If seithr reached the island, however secure the barrier was, it couldn't be said that this island was secure. Leaving out the matter that seithr was poisonous, it was likely that the Black Beast would appear here.

"Wait, wait, wait, Kazuma-chan. Look carefully."

While chuckling as if amused, Terumi poked the barrier again. His tiptoe rubbed the stuck paper, but as if it existed in a different airspace, the paper was undisturbed.

Being told to, Kazuma looked closely at the produced hole in the barrier. But immediately he guessed that his eyes didn't see what they should have seen.

Through the hollowed, unfolded hole of the barrier, he could see seithr pouring in.

But no sooner had the seithr came into contact with Ishana's air than it faded away and vanished in a flash.

The seithr hadn't been able to even slightly pollute Ishana's air.

"The barrier... is neutralizing seithr?"

It was the first time for him to hear the Mages' Guild's barrier had such a power.

Terumi laughed as if he knew the secret.

"W-R-O-N-G. It's because this island's air is unusually clean. But that ain't thanks to the barrier."

"Then, what...?"

"You think of something?"

Kazuma frowned. It was a difficult question.

"I don't know. Do you not know either?"

"Well~, who knows."

Terumi's suggestive manner of speaking made Kazuma let out a small sigh. These were confusing matters when Kazuma had just met him, but he had grown accustomed to this kind of attitude from Terumi in the passt few days.

Terumi was that kind of a man.

"Still, nothing will happen to this island anytime soon. Relieved, young master?"

Terumi spoke in a sarcastic voice.

But for Kazuma, such a thing was still okay for now.

His gaze was fascinated by the gaping hole, as if it was being drawn in.

The barrier being perforated was a state of emergency that shouldn't be possible. But for some reason, there it was, a hole.

A small unusual phenomenon. It really made Kazuma's heart pound. He somehow got excited.

Terumi's crescent mouth drew near to Kazuma, who was still staring intently at the hole. He whispered from behind.

"But it doesn't mean it'll stay like this forever. If the balance of the island's atmosphere changes a little... then..."

"Seithr... will enter the island?"

Like he was being lured, Kazuma muttered. It seemed his thought and mouth moved on their own accords.

Instead of nodding, Terumi laughed his confirmation.

"That's right. It's a disaster for this peaceful island to get harmed by seithr. It's a major incident, really serious affair, and a big problem, right?"

"Yes. It's a big problem..."

"Well then, Kazuma-chan. I've got a question now."

He could hear the mischievous voice close to his ear.

Kazuma had a hunch he knew what Terumi was going to say before hearing it.

"You said just now. It's 'oh no, if I don't quickly notify them...!'."

He imitated Kazuma's tone of voice as he said it.

But the mockery didn't manage to rub Kazuma's nerves the wrong way. Kazuma just stared at the hole as if fascinated by it.

Terumi spoke.

"So? Who do you notify?"

Right. He couldn't ignore the torn barrier. But since it wasn't possible for Kazuma to do something about it alone, he must inform someone about it.

To whom?

Restoring the barrier wasn't an easy task. At least, it wasn't possible at the level of an academy student.

To maintain the barrier, this spot alone had to be fixed. It also had to be done quickly.

For someone to be able to do such advanced things, they would have to excel in magical ability, even within the in Mages' Guild.

For example... the Ten Sages.

"Ten Sages..."

Kazuma's muttering leaked out as if spilling.

His lips moved as if by reflex.

"In case seithr got into Ishana... The Ten Sages would eliminate it and try to restore the barrier."

Just as with restoring the barrier, there was nobody else who could eliminate seithr.

Basically, it was impossible to get rid of seithr by human hands. If such a thing had been feasible, then it would have been possible to defeat Black Beast which was essentially a mass of seithr.

Suppose a magic that could neutralize and erase seithr existed, there would only be a handful of people who could do it as handling it was beyond ordinary men. Even ignoring neutralisation, dealing with seithr required knowledge of advanced magic.

Currently, Kazuma didn't know the exact number of Sages. But most of the students in the academy were aware that there were less than ten.

Driving away seithr, possibly by neutralizing it, and restoring the barrier had to be done simultaneously.

Even if the seithr was driven out first, if the hole was open, then new seithr would just get in again. If restoring the barrier came first, since there would be no outlet for seithr, they would have to increase the neutralization to the inner part of the island.

If such a situation happened, even at the best of times, the small number of Ten Sages would all gather.

With them all spending their time and energy on it, perhaps they would be shorthanded with other things.

Of course, Nine, too.

"Well, Whatcha gonna do, Kazuma-chan?"

Terumi's voice resounded inside his head.

Kazuma swallowed a small amount of saliva, his throat had grown dry.

"——Ah."

He tried to say something.

But just before the words came.

Terumi suddenly pulled Kazuma's shoulder, forcing him to turn around.

"Wha..."

He was about to ask what Terumi was doing. However, Kazuma was at loss for words again.

Nine and Trinity were stood behind him.

Part 5

It was getting darker.

There were no street lights in the outskirts of the island. As the facial expressions of both parties gradually became undiscernable, without saying anything, Trinity created a faint light and let it float into the air.

As if both parties were wary of each other, silence flowed. What broke it was Nine's sharp voice.

"What are you doing? In this place... Alone."

"Eh...?"

Alone.

Because of Nine's words, Kazuma looked toward the surrounding in a panic.

(Terumi-san's gone...? Since when...)

However, Terumi's habit of appearing in unexpected places, at unexpected moments had saved Kazuma this time. If Nine became aware of Terumi's existence, it was unlikely to be good news for Kazuma..

"Looking for a way out? Looks like you're too slow."

Nine sneered at Kazuma's trembling figure, addressing him with a cold tone of voice.

Kazuma straightened his back in order to adjust his breathing. He told himself to calm down.

...As he did so, his head surprisingly quickly regained clarity. It was strange.

"RWay out? Why would I run away?"

Kazuma's words made Nine's expression slightly shift. Trinity's light was helping, but it was nonetheless dark. He was unable to examine the details of her facial expression, but it didn't appear to be a happy face.

"Besides, why did you two come here? I don't believe this is a place girls would visit at this hour."

Lifting her head slightly at Kazuma's question, Trinity took a large step forward.

"Because you didn't come back to the shop... we wondered where you might have gone to~."

"Even so, it seems you were able to find me easily. Did you use tracking magic?"

Asking with a mocking smile, Trinity kept her mouth shut. Rather than the face of someone who had been found out, it was like the face of a girl, hurt by thoughtless words.

Kazuma shrugged his shoulders. It didn't change the situation even if he had guessed right. Perhaps Trinity still thought that Kazuma hadn't noticed she was monitoring him. If so, what a pitiful girl.

"I'll ask the questions. Answer me. What have you been doing here?"

Different from Trinity, without any sign of backing down, Nine made her tone of voice even sharper.

Kazuma made a troubled face, placing a hand on his head as if enduring a headache, he answered her.

"But I thought I told you before, I happened to see an acquaintance, so I ran after him. ...Although I said that, I suddenly realised I recognized him as just an acquaintance. I don't remember who he was."

"Could it be an acquaintance from before the memory loss?"

Sure enough, Trinity's surprise rang out in her voice. Regardless of the light, he could see her delightful facial expression was brimming.

Kazuma spontaneously dropped a smile.

Even now, Trinity perhaps still wished for Kazuma's memory to return. If that was the case, it was painful for every single word from him to betray her kindness.

"Yes, I think so. When I caught sight of him, I was unable to contain myself... I'm sorry."

And yet numerous untruths spilled from his mouth.

But Nine's sharp presence didn't even slightly slacken as expected. Instead it became even more coercive; the glints in her eyes shone in the dead of night.

"If so, I wonder if that's the doing of your acquaintance?"

"What do you mean?"

Kazuma carefully asked.

Nine walked gallantly with long steps and passed by Kazuma's side. She walked gracefully in her thin, tall heels on the unstable rocky area before stopping at some shrubbery.

"This."

She replied in a haughty voice.

He knew exactly what Nine had seen to make her say that.

Imitating a normal student's behavior, Kazuma took a quick look at the beach.

"Aah, that. I wonder what on earth it is. It looks like paper floating in the air to me... Is it some kind of a good luck charm?"

As he scratched his head while answering with the pretense that he knew nothing about it, Nine glared over her shoulder. Her beautiful face which carried nothing but malice made his guts grow cold.

"Don't tell me you don't know anything about it."

"No... B-But I don't know."

Flinching, Kazuma took a step backward.

As if Nine's eyes were assessing every facet of his gesture for credibility, she carefully glared at Kazuma's entire body. Dyed in shadow, the long eyelashes on Nine's eyes blinked several times.

Trinity didn't say anything. Accompanied by the small light, she appeared to wrack her brains while attentively watching Nine and Kazuma's standoff.

Waves split open at Kazuma and Nine's feet. The modest sound of water disturbed the silence.

As Nine closed blinked once, then turned her face away from Kazuma.

"...Fine. Then I'll leave it as it is."

The high-pitched noise of heels hitting the rocky area resounded.

Nine moved away from him. As she did so, Kazuma quietly slackened his mouth.

Was that an indication that she had found him out? Or did his deceit go unnoticed under the cover of night? Nine stopped once more a little in front of Trinity, she looked over her shoulder to see Kazuma and asked, as if testing him.

"It seems there was a huge idiot making a hole in Mages' Guild's barrier. I have to quickly get in touch with the Ten Sages and arrange to restore it. That's why..."

Nine smiled provocatively.

"If you discover something else while out for a run, do you think you could let me know?"

Her glamorous hair fluttered as if dancing. After she urged Trinity, who was still concerned about Kazuma, onward, the two left from that place at a quick pace.

Eventually the noise of grass being tread on vanished along with Trinity's light. The sky was now definitely the color of night. Suddenly the air grew cold; it was too cold to stand in one place in a daze.

Still feeling waves splash on his feet, Kazuma expressionlessly looked at the papers in the shade of the rocky area.

The hole in the barrier. There was still no indication of seithr coming in from there.

That hole had a role. Connecting the outside world to the island; its role was to cause such a large task for the Ten Sages that they all had to be in attendance.

(Even if this hole got closed, there is a way to open it, so it'd be good to find it. However...)

Nine of the Ten Sages. She alone seemed to continue being cautious of Kazuma even just now.

It would be preferable for this hole to draw in seithr to an extent so that Nine had to give her full attention to fixing the barrier; and hereafter, Nine would pay no attention to Kazuma.

(Alternatively... something that disappears during the situation while she's preoccupied.)

At any rate, she was a hindrance.

Pondering while standing still on the rocky area, Kazuma gnawed on a fingerhe had stuck in his mouth. His teeth scrubbed the joints.

A method to keep Nine at a distance.

"...Isn't it easy?"

Kazuma chuckled and hurriedly left behind the rocky area.

Chapter 5: Night of Black Betrayal

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Part 1

And then, night came.

A night that was creepy for some reason. The moon which was waning in the dark sky took control, while there was scarce wind.

A terribly chaotic night in which the deep black of night sky and sea were mixed together in the distant horizon.

Kazuma stood alone on rocky area lit only by the moon's faint light.

About two hours ago, it was the place he barely managed to arrive at after chasing after Terumi and also the place where he encountered Nine and Trinity to make the matter worse.

Without the moon's light the rocky area would be like a shadowy lump; on the opposite side, the faint sound of waves breaking splashed through the darkness. If there was a place referred as another world, then this location seemed to be the boundary line with the known world.

He was musing on whether his world was already coming to an end or not. The night and silence had yet come to an end.

Just about everything seemed to have already ended...

On the opposite side of the bushes, small lights flickered.

Kazuma hid himself out of view in the shade of a nearby rock, wary of danger.

(It's still too early for the end. Rather... this is the start.)

If he were to be asked what it meant, he'd reply that it means

everything.

Yes, getting back everything. Like Terumi had said in the beginning.

The image of a wavering silhouette, one that appeared by shoving and separating bushes to make their way through the forest was the person Kazuma waited for.

It was like they had no grasp of caution. He doubted she was ever cautious with anybody.

Kazuma smoothly stepped forward intounder the moonlight, greeting her with gentle smile.

"Did you come without telling anyone? ...Celica A. Mercury-san."

Black and white uniform of the academy; long ponytail that bounced with every step. Her large, shining, brown eyes, illuminated by the burning magic flame at her fingertips, were easily visible in this dark place.

Celica turned the light on him. Once she realized the other party was Kazuma, her relieved face quickly became cheerful.

"It's okay. Since Onee-chan called a meeting all of a sudden, there's no one at home."

With light steps, Celica rushed over just close to Kazuma.

That moment, Kazuma tasted the massive weight of a sensation from the surrounding atmosphere.

Powerfully clenching his molars, he desperately held his breath for several seconds. He grew pale in an instant. His head felt fuzzy; dizziness and nausea made him feel weaker at the knees.

Why did he get this sick when he was together with Celica? He didn't know the reason, but he couldn't pass out or run back home out here.

"That's good. After all, I have something I must tell just to Celica-san alone."

While gathering courage in his mind, Kazuma gave a smile as if he was relieved.

Not suspecting anything, Celica stared at Kazuma with serious look.

"But what do you want to tell me? ...You said that it's about Father."

After he parted with Nine and Trinity, Kazuma hastily returned to the island, quickly reaching the main street and searching for Celica's home. Immediately after their confrontation, Nine should be heading to Mage’s Guild in order to report to the Ten Sages. It was a race for him to find it before Nine returned.

When he bumped into Celica who was on her way home after shopping in the vicinity of the café from earlier, it was the first time he had ever thanked God for his good fortune. Since he didn't happen to have fragments of faith, he had to be pleased with only a vague image of God.

I have something to tell you about Professor Shuuichirou Ayatsuki.

Saying only that and telling her he would could only explain here, Kazuma immediately left... awaiting her arrival here. He didn't bring Celica along with him in case they were seen by Nine on her way to the Guild.

With the dark rocky area and sea as his background, Kazuma slightly nodded with a very serious appearance.

"Celica A. Mercury-san. As I know you and Nine-san are Shuuichirou Ayatsuki's daughters, I have checked up a little regarding your father. Since six years ago on that day... he's missing, isn't he?"

Six years ago on that day, a world threatening demon, the Black Beast, appeared in Japan. A day when nuclear strikes razed the island nation to the ground.

Just before the nuclear attack, all the people who had been living in the strikes' target, Japan, were evacuated. But those departures weren't flawless; several people couldn't escape and were left inside the country.

Shuuichirou Ayatsuki was one of them. While the islands were being turned into scorched earth, he was in Japan.

Hearing her father's name, Celica's pupils wavered in loneliness.

"...You were told he's missing, weren't you."

The spilled muttering was like she felt relief and had abandoned hope; a delicate sound.

"And yet Onee-chan and people around me said my father had died. There was a small funeral, you know?"

"...How do you feel about it?"

"Eh?"

Celica shifted her attention to Kazuma's gentle words, as if bewildered.

Although her complexion was disturbed, her eyes remained focused. Her unclouded gaze once more gave Kazuma a mysterious chill.

Enduring it, Kazuma stared back at her.

"A few days ago, you know there was news of a survivor found in Japan. You were watching the news so intently. ...Were you thinking about him? About Shuuichirou Ayatsuki, your father, who died in the nuclear attack six years ago...?"

"That's..."

Uncharacteristically, Celica hesitated and was at loss for words.

Her belief of her father being alive, the feeling which she always used to say that she couldn't put into words, had no basis. That was why it was only a wish, a wish that he was still alive.

Even Celica understood how much of a miracle it was to find a survivor in Japan. She knew a similar miracle couldn't happen many times.

There might only be one fortune card in the deck that the survivor had drawn from.

As if giving it a thought, Kazuma folded his arms in slow movement and turned his head toward the sea. On the horizon, the dark night and sea merged; their border couldn't easily be distinguished.

He focused his gaze beyond the deep darkness. He wasn't even sure in which direction from here Japan existed, but felt like he was gazing right at it.

"To tell you the truth, since then, I also had personal interest in the news and investigated it."

"You did?"

"Yes. The man rescued the other day seems to work as a researcher in a research institute, similar to Professor Ayatsuki. But six years ago, he got engrossed in his study and completely forgot about the fixed date for the evacuation. Luckily, since a few days before the nuclear attack, he stayed at a research facility that was deep underground. It might be thanks to that, that he was spared."

Cutting off his words, still facing the sea, Kazuma returned his gaze to Celica in order to look at her reaction.

Celica's large eyes opened even wider. Apparently motionless, she stood stock still while attentively listening to Kazuma's words.

Kazuma's story was information yet to be released to public. Celica also probably just heard it for the first time.

It was the work of the Mages' Guild. If they were motivated, they would investigate in the outside world. Under the cover of the dark

night, Kazuma secretly chuckled.

"Professor Ayatsuki is a world-famous researcher. If he was conducting research, it would have been done in an appropriately large facility. I didn't investigate as to where the professor worked, but there must have been an underground facility there."

Undoubtedly, the research institute where the male survivor was employed couldn't have been called large in scale. Yet still the underground facility of that research institute had the strength to withstand a nuclear attack.

It was unthinkable for the workplace of the world-famous researcher Shuuichirou Ayatsuki to have inferior security.

"Besides..." whispered Kazuma with low voice while slowly turning to Celica.

"The man is simply a survivor. ...However, it seems he's given an unusual statement."

"What's unusual about it?"

Drawn in, Celica lowered her voice.

The wind made the silhouettes of the tree tops flicker.

It wasn't clear which the roar of waves and which the noise of forest was. Waiting for the noise to die down, Kazuma calmly continued the story.

"He said, 'It's unbelievable for six years to have passed since then. One year... or at most, two years I believe has passed.'"

"Six years... to one year? No matter what, that's..."

"Certainly it seems hard to believe. But that's where it gets more unusual. ...The man didn't leave the research institute. He passed time eating the stored emergency food. However, even if it was consumed by only one person, the amount was no where near enough to last six years. Moreover, his body weight is currently average, he's not even especially skinny.

"Eh, eh? Wait, what do you mean?"

The light on her fingertip wandered about as the confused Celica put her hand on her head.

Calmly, like he was talking to a child, Kazuma tried to rephrase it in slow tone.

"You see, the man had been living under the ruins for six years. Yet the evidence of his having lived there are estimated to be from just two years at most.

It wasn't only that. Six years was a long time. It would degrade and weaken his body. If his hair was cut, the shorn hair would remain. His clothes would deteriorate. His footwear would wear down. On top of all that, the man had been verified that he had lived in the underground for two years at most.

"Two years..."

Celica muttered in a soft voice. She wore an expression of disbelief.

As if giving it a thought, Kazuma stroked his chin with a meek expression.

"It's a truly unimaginable phenomenon. But as for the traces of living for two rather than six years, It doesn't seem likely for experts to mistake it even if they're only giving it a glance. Besides... there's already one unimaginable monster existing in our world."

"...The Black Beast."

Sluggishly speaking that name, Celica's expression got even stiffer.

On the other side of the barrier that wrapped around the island, the world was constantly frightened of Black Beast's fangs. It was like a nightmare. But it was certainly an unmistakable reality that burdened the world.

Kazuma let slip a single cynical sigh.

"Japan is closely related to that monster. For a place where

unexplainable phenomena have occurred several times, it's not unexpected."

The span of six years becoming two; was it also possible for it to be reduced to an even shorter length? It wasn't a miracle either way. Japan was just that kind of a place.

"...Perhaps so."

To suppress the anxiety, welling up in her chest, Celica embraced her chest with both hands. In that ridiculous, irrational land, her father was left behind alone.

To cheer up her up, Kazuma put his hand on Celica's shoulder.

The moment they touched, discomfort and rejection rushed through him as if an extremely repulsive thing was crushing him with with all its strength. Beneath his calm expression, Kazuma desperately tried to relax his unnaturally stiffening hand.

"Celica-san. Please think about it. Surviving for six years versus surviving for two years underneath the harsh environment; don't you think there's a huge difference in the survival rate?"

Kazuma's pale lips expressed a smile to encourage her.

"If, in the same way the survivor from the other day did, Professor Ayatsuki was in a sturdy underground facility. If, in the same way, he was blessed with preserved food. If, in the same way, he was living within the miraculously slowed flow of time. Then..."

Gasping slightly, Celica looked up intensely at Kazuma. Even though her large pupils seemed to be slightly wet, she looked at him.

"Maybe... Father is also..."

While surrounded by weakened thought, Celica spoke in a trembling voice.

"Father is also... possibly, alive...?"

It might be a shortsighted wish. It might be a foolish delusion.

But the pieces of information Kazuma displayed side by side in front of Celica supported her prayer-like thought toward her father.

When Kazuma pulled his lips making a wide smile, Celica's face bloomed like a large flower.

But before that smiling face stopped blooming, Kazuma unexpectedly retracted his smile. The hand that had been placed on the girl's shoulder was weakly released as if it had fallen.

"But... Too bad, isn't it."

As he slightly sighed, hinting at his disappointment, Kazuma turned his gaze away from Celica, toward his feet.

Celica followed his gaze.

"What's wrong?"

"...I hate to say it... but I heard that it seems the army the UN have currently dispatched to Japan is aiming to establish an on-site investigation. Just because a single survivor was found, there's no particular plan to search for other survivors..."

"W-Why!? There might be other people who are alive!"

Celica's smiling face was frozen midway in shock.

Celica balled her hands into fists. As if to calm her, but also in a voice that didn't conceal discouragement, Kazuma answered.

"It's unknown how many people were missing in the first place. Even at the best of times, they can't separate the few personnel they have. Everyone has been thinking that this time was just a fortunate chance, so they think it's still hopeless for the survival of the other people left in Japan six years ago."

Because of the large scale nuclear attack, the ground's surface was ruined. Furthermore, six years had passed. It was meaningless to delay the original purpose of the investigation just because, by

miraculous chance, a survivor had been found. It was because the likelihood of discovering a new survivor was close to zero.

Dropping his shoulders, Kazuma shook his head to grieve.

"Assuming Professor Ayatsuki's alive... Whether he'll be located by the army or not, it'd be better to send someone unrelated to the army there to search for the professor."

"Yeah... But people who aren't soldiers aren't allowed to land in Japan."

Kazuma could sense her dejection. Making his own facade appear cheery, as if he had the solution, he could truly think of nothing other than how he would rather not be so close to her.

"Oh, you didn't know? Just the other day, approval for civilian passage to Japan was granted. From the port city nearest to Japan, a number of ferries should be leaving on the first day of the month."

"Is that... true!? People can go to Japan without being a soldier!? E-Even me!?"

Raising her voice in surprise, Celica took Kazuma's hands within both of hers.

"Hii...!"

Not prepared for this, a noise like a scream escaped from Kazuma's mouth due to his shock.

However, not perturbed by this, Celica drew even closer to Kazuma.

"Anyone's fine? Without any formalities or inspections?"

"Y-Yes... I heard that there's only a voyage fee and a brief inspection required to get across."

"Then, then... Even I can go to Japan, right!?"

"Yes, of course. But won't it be difficult for you? Walking from place to place across Japan, looking for your lost father?"

While enduring the sickening feeling, as he still couldn't shake off Celica's hands which gripped his, Kazuma desperately spoke.

Strength filled with enthusiasm was added to Celica's hands.

Kazuma's hands were cold. Celica's hands were warm; the girl's throbbing heartbeat seemed audible.

"I... want to save Father. No, I'll go!"

Where did the hesitation from when she was asked if she thought her father was alive go to? As if blowing away all the doubt she had until now, Celica looked up straight at Kazuma.

Even though the night was dark, Celica's deep brown eyes could be seen clearly.

While getting a chill that almost made him faint, from the pure and innocent color, Kazuma squeezed Celica's hands back, with a frown on his face.

"You'll go... to Japan? You mustn't. It's too dangerous."

"But, isn't there a possibly that no other people will try to save Father? Everyone believes Father is dead. People who need help won't get rescued!"

It looked like there was already no trace of doubt in her.

Kazuma let out a troubled groan. But as if yielding to the strong determination in Celica's gaze, Kazuma finally smiled wryly.

"Looks like it's useless to try to stop you."

"Aha. Onee-chan told me exactly the same."

Vigorously, the long ponytail on Celica's back jumped.

"That's right. Onee-chan doesn't know anything about this. After I tell her, we'll board a ship as soon as possible..."

"Aah, about telling Nine-san... I think it's better to pass on it."

Toward the cheerfully smiling Celica whose expression was bright enough to illuminate even the dark night, Kazuma spoke while slipping a bit of gloom into his voice.

Still holding Kazuma's hands, Celica bent her head slightly as if puzzled.

"Why?"

"Nine-san will surely object to your decision. She's one of the Ten Sages. She can pull strings to prevent you being issued the permission to leave the island."

"Onee-chan doing that sort of thing..."

Is unthinkable, a statement which, however optimistic the good-natured Celica was, even she couldn't say. As her lips distorted into a pout, her eyebrows lowered as if troubled.

"But... there's no way I can go while keeping it quiet. Besides, if I apply to leave the island, it'll get circulated to Onee-chan anyway. In the end, wherever I go, I think I won't be able to proceed without her knowing."

There was a formal procedure to leave Ishana. If Celica tried to leave, confirming it with Nine, her guardian, was to be expected.

Celica sighed, realising that her chance to find her father was flying out the window. Kazuma smiled to cheer her up and softly whispered in her ear.

"Celica-san. If I said there's a way to get out of the island without your sister finding out... what would you do?"

Instantly, the night fell silent as if it was holding its breath. Gentle wind blew past as if trying to move something to reveal a secret.

Celica's long hair swayed.

"...You can get me out?"

It was Celica's true feeling which leaked out unintentionally.

Kazuma nodded to persuade her.

"Do you want to know the details?"

As for Celica's reply, it was clear from the beginning.

——There's a secret exit. From there, you can leave Ishana's barrier.

However, it'll close if you don't hurry. It's no good if you don't pass through it as soon as possible tonight.

Once you're outside of the barrier, please go along the island's outer wall to the harbor.

You're good at levitation, right?

The procedure to go out is only necessary when you're exiting the barrier.

A ship will arrive once morning comes.

What you do after that... is up to you.

Part 2

Since the following day was a holiday, Kazuma woke up later than usual.

It might be because last night he had returned exhausted by the night's events; a sluggish feel remained this morning, as though he still hadn't had enough sleep. He stretched his body while still only half awake and then opened the curtains.

From there, Kazuma beheld a change in the situation.

The scene he was seeing was faintly coated in a putrid haze.

It was seithr.

The seithr, which had lost to Ishana's pure air and been unable to enter through the hole in the barrier until yesterday, somehow spread out, causing corrosion now.

Last night, a young girl crossed Ishana's barrier and went outside. At that time, something had taken a place that might have created an opportunity to draw in the outside seithr.

Kazuma didn't know the details of the cause, but there was undoubtedly a good chance that this was it.

Nine and the other Sages didn't close the hole last night. Furthermore, while it wasn't clear when it had started, the influx of seithr abruptly began.

He snapped out of it at once.

After he threw off his nightclothes, Kazuma carefully changed into his school uniform. He was about to burst out of the room after properly pinning down his hair.

Then, when Kazuma's hand was about to grab the doorknob, the door was knocked violently.

Because of the surprise, he almost let out a yelp. Taking a deep breath and then holding it, Kazuma responded in a calm tone of voice.

"Who is it?"

What returned from the other side of the door was unexpected, but also had an expected tone of voice.

"OPEN THE DOOR QUICKLY! OR ELSE, I'LL BLOW IT DOWN!"

It was Nine. He couldn't see her facial expression, but he was aware she was furious just from her voice.

Kazuma opened the door in a hurry.

"P-Please spare me. It's the academy's property...!"

The toe of her high heel forced its way into the small opened gap; and the door was flung open just like that.

Behind Nine, who impolitely barged into room, stood the baffled Trinity.

After Nine rudely cornered Kazuma against the desk close to the wall, she grabbed Kazuma's collar with both hands and strangled him.

"...Tell me where Celica is."

"Uh, guh... Wh-What is it... s- suddenly..."

There was no mercy in Nine's hands.

With his throat pressured by her bloodthirsty strength, Kazuma's breathing became disabled in the blink of an eye. He tried to quickly tear off Nine's hands, but there was already no strength reaching his fingertips.

"Guh... Cough... Le-Let go..."

"Tell me Celica's whereabouts. If you obediently confess, I'll let you live."

Nine's eyes glared up at Kazuma with a terrifying sharpness. When their eyes met, that instant the instinctive panic turned to chill, making Kazuma's spine shiver

"Nine! Please stop already...!"

Trinity rushed over in a panic. Rather than an attempt to calm her, it was more like she was begging.

"Kazuma-san is about to die... Besides, he can't even talk like that."

After Nine tutted at her close friend's words, she released Kazuma so he hit the floor.

Since his staggering feet couldn't support his body, Kazuma fall on his backside onto the carpet. As his breath returned all at once, his throat spasmed and coughed at the pain.

From above his head, clicking of Nine's tongue could be heard.

"I've released you. Now answer."

"You told me to answer... but please let me know the situation first. Is there something wrong with Celica-san?"

Still sitting on his rear end, Kazuma rubbed his throat while looking up at Nine. Because of the suffocation, the insides of his ears were ringing.

Looking like her anger was still simmering, Nine folded her arms under the voluptuous chest and disheveled her hair.

Substituting for her when she didn't answer, Trinity kneeled near Kazuma and informed him.

"The truth is, it happened suddenly this morning. Celica-san's whereabouts became unknown..."

"Then... do you mean she's missing? Why?"

"WE CAME TO YOUR PLACE SINCE IT ISN'T KNOWN!"

Nine's anger soared. Her voice and body language were harsh, showing her utmost irritation.

Kazuma backed up with a stiff face and asked in an incomprehensible tone of voice.

"Th-That's why, for what reason do you ask me? I shouldn't know anything, right?"

"IF YOU DON'T KNOW, NO ONE ELSE DOES!"

Nine yelled to quickly dismiss Kazuma's opinion.

But immediately Trinity who was watching in suspense noticed it. After Nine roughly brushed away her hair, she took out a piece of paper and threw it, aiming at Kazuma's face.

"Ouch."

What hit his cheek was a light yellow piece of paper, folded in four. Kazuma picked up the paper which had helplessly fallen before unfolding it.

The characters were clear; but it was composed of writing errors left behind in some places as if written in a hurry.

"To Onee-chan. Sorry, I'm going to Japan to search for Father. I'm all right, so don't worry about it. I'll definitely return, so let's have another tea with you, Trinity-san, and Kazuma-san! Celica"

Not describing even the circumstances and single-minded recklessness at her own convenience; it was indeed a Celica-like

letter.

After Kazuma finished reading the letter's contents, Nine began to talk in a threatening and aggressive manner.

"Yesterday, you brought up the matter about her father. But until now, whenever someone brought it up, Celica never rushed out to find him like now. You influenced Celica to do something irresponsible, didn't you!? If you didn't, THEN WHY IS THIS HAPPENING!?"

The words which started in low tone finally ignited with rage; Nine violently kicked the chair beside Kazuma. The modest chair gave a creak and fell over.

"I sympathize with your feeling, but please don't break the furnitu..."

Even while flinching from the rough sound, Kazuma spoke back. Responding to it, Nine's high heels went silent. She pinned Kazuma's shoulder to the desk behind with her high heel.

"...I'm asking you once more. Answer honestly. I'll kill you if you give me lies."

"Y-Yes."

"Where did Celica go? What have you been telling that girl?"

Konoe Mercury, the prodigy who was blessed with exceptional talent. The ninth Sage. With unusual force, her eyes glared at Kazuma as if shooting through him with their glints.

Were those eyes also shooting through the truth which Kazuma kept to himself?

As if overpowered, Kazuma raised his eyes at Nine and squeezed out the answer.

"I... I don't know. Nothing."

Nine's face distorted in terrible displeasure. Like a whip, her arms

stretched out, seizing Kazuma's collar for the second time.

Kazuma raised a miserable voice and moved his body a little.

Trinity bent herself forward to stop Nine.

Then, it was in that moment. From the window, a beam of light shot between them. It came from the direction of the academy.

The light was as thick as a person's index finger and hit the room's floor without damaging the windowpane. With the smoothness of signing a document, it drew a message.

——The Ten Sages are to assemble at once.

After its brief message, the light which had lasted for five seconds disappeared.

It was a conveying magic. The request from the Mages' Guild's officials had to be for the Ten Sages.

It was obviously addressed to Nine.

"At such a time..."

Groaning in irritation, Nine let go of Kazuma again.

"It seems you've escaped death. I'll interrogate you further next time."

Forcefully holding down her anger, Nine turned around, together with her hair and mantle. Like that, she dashed out of the room without giving Kazuma so much as a backwards glance.

In the quiet and simple hallway of the boy's dormitory, loud footsteps from high heels reverberated loudly.

While listening to the dying sounds of the footsteps as they got further away, Trinity lowered her eyebrows; and while still sitting, she reached out her hand to Kazuma prompting him to take it.

"Sorry. Please... don't get offended~."

Gripping kazuma's hand as he rose to his feet, Trinity spoke as if wishing. Her gentle eyes were awfully sad and had grown wet; it looked like she would begin to cry any time soon.

"For Nine, Celica-san is her only precious family. Her mother died a very long time ago and her father left home ten years ago. It seems Nine has lived while always, always protecting Celica-san."

"That's why she's that overprotective, I see."

Looking toward the direction of the door that was still left open, Kazuma muttered in bitter sympathy.

Trinity slightly nodded. She was a much shorter girl when compared to Kazuma, but she seemed smaller than ever now.

"Despite her appearance, Nine's a very sensitive girl. When Celica-san's, her irreplaceable sister's figure is missing, I know that she can't help but feel anxious and worried. That's why..."

Trinity raised her eyes to Kazuma with calm tone of voice. The wise green eyes were wishing, seemingly begging.

"About Celica-san. If you know something, please tell～. It's all right to speak it to me. Even if it's only a bit of information, I think it'll calm Nine down."

"...Umm. My apologies."

Kazuma pulled his hand away from Trinity's.

"I truly don't know where Celica-san might have gone to. I'm worried about Celica-san nonetheless."

He only said sorry as he looked downward. The dropped gaze was even lower than at Trinity who was looking up.

For a little while, Trinity looked shocked and hesitated to speak, but she eventually raised her face and showed a smile through her tears.

"That's so, isn't it. I've been very rude... being somewhat doubting. If

you learn about something, then..."

"Of course. Even if it's minor, I'll tell you if I learn something."

It was a promise he couldn't keep but it did help to encourage her, Trinity's eyes began to open at Kazuma's words. Holding her chest with the fingers peeking out from her loose sleeves, she deeply bowed her head.

"Thank you, Kazuma-san~. Then, I'll also excuse myself. I'm worried to leave Nine alone as she is now."

"Be careful."

Kazuma replied with a slight nod.

When Trinity entered the hallway, in front of the door she once again bowed her head, just slightly this time. The hem of her long robe waved as she began to jog to chase after Nine.

Until the retreating figure that was like a small person from a fairy-tale disappeared down the staircase, until the still vanishing footsteps completely disappeared, Kazuma stood in front of the room and continued to see her off.

The hallway of the dormitory was silent.

After Kazuma returned to the room, he went toward the window. Placing his back against the wall, he made sure to hide himself and peeked outside from behind the lace curtain.

After a short while, he saw a small retreating figure with platinum blonde hair, which could be clearly seen even from a distance, spilling from her hood while she ran out of the dormitory. For a moment, she looked over her shoulder as if something was bothering her; but without looking up at the room's window, she left just like that.

The figure completely disappeared from Kazuma's sight.

Leaning his body near the window, Kazuma took a thin, deep breath.

"...Khu..."

His emotions were welling up, his slender shoulders were trembling as if shaking. Unable to endure it, Kazuma covered his face with his palm.

Between the spread of his thin fingers, the ends of his lips gradually raised up.

"Khu, kuku... Fu, hahahahahahahahaha."

It was amusing. He couldn't suppress the laugh at all.

As his stomach convulsed, his sides grew painful. His back slid down the wall until he was once again sat on the floor. Even so, he kept on laughing even more.

"Khukkukukuku, hahahaha, fuhaha, ha... Oh no, my stomach hurts... Khuku, what's with those faces? The faces both of them made... Hi, hahaha. Even if they search anywhere on this island, that girl isn't here anymore."

The important younger sister, the precious friend's younger sister; she must have got on a ship which departed early this morning and was crossing over the ocean about now. It was already too late to panic as it was approaching noon now.

What was even more amusing was that Nine, who had threatened to kill Kazuma if he told lies, didn't kill him after all; and following that, even Trinity left Kazuma behind and took off.

In the end, Nine gave up on determining if Kazuma's words were lies.

In the end, Trinity gave up on doubting Kazuma.

Naïve, naïve, naïve. Terumi had said it some time ago.

Saying things like "after being imprisoned on such a disgusting island, Kazuma didn't have to be influences by those dumb pretty magicians".

Good grief. It was sentimental enough to suffocated him. It was because he secluded himself inside the island, that Terumi called disgusting, and only spent time alone in his room that he couldn't make clear judgment.

So sweet it made him want to vomit.

"Aah... To laugh and speak in such a manner."

As he hit his head against the wall, making a dull sound, Kazuma again and again laughed while facing the ceiling.

He used to think that he couldn't fathom the joyful laughter of someone in the academy when he heard it. But might their laughter also be this refreshing?

His chest felt refreshed; it was a feeling like he was looking up at a clear blue sky.

Nothing would hinder him anymore.

Nothing would refuse him anymore.

Nothing would shun him anymore.

The road was all set.

"I..."

On the ceiling he looked up at, there was an old stain. From the time he had first applied at the school, he had grown accustomed to it. An unchanging stain.

You've been in such a boring place, right? You've been in such a narrow and suffocating place, right?

Everything had already ended.

Reversing his motions from before, Kazuma slid his back up the wall while standing up.

Outside of the window was the invigorating Ishana which was

turning impure, dyed in seithr.

It was amusing. It was so extremely delightful and enjoyable that he was about to laugh uncontrollably again.

"I'm going to obtain it..."

He tore his shadow from the wall as he began to walk.

The destination had been decided.

He was going to obtain it.

The *Azure*.

Part 3

Mages' Guild——Cathedral.

A place where Mages' Guild's ceremonies were held, including the Ten Sages' canonization. It was also a facility that continued to witness the long history of the Mages' Guild in this land. For those reasons, the Cathedral was also said to be a symbol indicating the Mages' Guild itself.

Positioned on a section of the academy's courtyard, its appearance was a small building made of white stone. But in reality, the construct had a lot of hidden space underground.

In the circular council room located in the Cathedral's underground, all the members of the Ten Sages on duty had been assembled due to the emergency.

Although it was all members, the number of people was less than ten.

Uniformly wearing dignified robes and large triangular hats, they, accompanied by quiet tension, were surrounding a round table with a strange pattern.

Of course, the figure of Nine who had been summoned by the conveying magic just a while ago was also among them.

"Everyone must have noticed already... Seithr is flowing into Ishana."

The emergency meeting began with a dignified, heavy tone of voice from a man acting as chair for the meeting.

Encircled by magic lights which were floating in midair, the Ten Sages held their breath.

Anybody was aware that seithr had begun to foul Ishana's air. But the question was how the seithr was getting in.

The chair continued.

"You must all remember Nine's report that a tear was forming in part of the barrier. It appears the seithr is coming through that tear."

At those words, several of the Ten Sages murmured in low tone.

Last night, the Ten Sages had also gathered like now. Then, a report from Nine was established regarding the tear in the barrier. But last night, as there had been no seithr getting in or any indication of it, the decision was made to postpone the restoration and investigation of the cause.

The female Sage sitting across from Nine knocked away her chair trying to stand up.

"What's the cause of the influx? In last night's report, there wasn't even a mention of seithr flowing from the tear...!?"

"Ishana's atmosphere should have been clean enough to force back seithr. It's unthinkable for it to have changed in one night!"

The Ten Sages unanimously shouted about the baffling matters.

Hearing this, Nine was absolutely silent as she looked downward.

Nine knew. She knew why seithr had increased in force in one night and covered Ishana's atmosphere.

There was a hole in the barrier; and the power that could prevent seithr getting to Ishana's air was gone. What had been holding back seithr was neither the barrier nor the pure atmosphere. It was a completely different factor.

(Celica...)

Her younger sister was born special. Somehow, she had never caught a cold or even been ill. From before she could speak, she

had been able to use healing magic. She possessed an abnormal life force.

The strange physical constitution of Celica, who only specialized in healing, had a special characteristic of restraining seithr's activity just by existing.

The theory on how she could do it was unknown. Because Nine had never thought to clarify it, she also shouldn't be able to prove it now. Naturally, the Ten Sages didn’t even know about Celica's physical constitution.

The only thing clearly known was, preventing the seithr influx was the result of Celica's idiosyncrasy affecting Ishana's atmosphere. Then, for seithr to be flowing meant that Celica had already left the island.

(Where did you go... Celica.)

Nine grasped her fists tightly above her lap.

Yesterday night, it had already grown very late when she returned home. Because she thought Celica would have been asleep, Nine didn't check her room and went to bed. She hated herself for it.

Last night, Celica must have already gone from the house.

If she could, she would immediately rush out of here and then proceed to find Celica. However.

"If we leave the seithr as it is, the barrier we have been protecting until now would become a lid and the whole island would be filled with seithr. If such a thing happened... the dense seithr would notify the Black Beast about our existence, and that monster would appear on the island."

The elderly woman who was the most senior among the Ten Sages spoke in a heavy voice.

Seithr was a portion of Black Beast, its vanguard, and also passage. In other words, when a location had seithr, it was assuredly a place that was at risk of the Black Beast appearing.

While seithr spread throughout the world, Ishana was the only exception. However, that exception was over now.

Trying to follow the elderly woman, other Sages opened their mouths one after another.

"If the Black Beast appears, this island will be helpless. We must restore the barrier at once, and stop the influx of seithr!"

"The threat is not just the Black Beast. If mankind comes into contact with dense seithr for a long period of time, bad effects would occur in their mind and body. Think about the potential of a massive outbreak of seithr poisoning too!"

"Restoring the barrier will take too much time. Removing the barrier temporarily and forming it again is more..."

"Ridiculous! That's the same as stripping the island naked. If it's done poorly, disturbing elements from outside would get in!"

"Still, the seithr density in Ishana is even higher than that found outside of the island."

"Even if we form the barrier again or restore the current one, during the time it takes, the people of this island will continue to be exposed with seithr. I wonder if there's nothing we could do to deal with the islanders right now."

If the barrier doesn't get closed, the seithr density on the island will continue to rise. But while the barrier is being closed, there would be potential for the Black Beast to sniff out the dense seithr and appear.

Currently, Ishana was confronting a crisis it had never encountered before.

The meeting was flooded with several claims; the way forward still couldn't be seen.

Toward it, Nine quietly formed her hands to fists; the mouth, that had remained fastened until then, opened.

"Restoring the barrier and disposing seithr are urgent duties that only we, the Ten Sages, can do. Neither of them can be given priority. We have to divide the Ten Sages into two groups, simultaneously taking measures. ...Immediately."

It wasn't the right sort of situation to crowd the desk and continue arguing.

With those cold, calm words, the room fell uniformly silent.

Everyone was considering if that was feasible. No matter which one they did, the strengths of everyone in this room were needed.

But finally, the chair made a fist and spoke.

"Indeed. I shall take it upon myself to restore the barrier. Nine, you are in charge of eliminating seithr."

"...Yes."

While leaving her chair, Nine nodded.

Nine also understood it wasn't a simple task. For everything to be resolved, a considerable amount of time would be needed. It would be already too late to chase after Celica.

Even so, Nine couldn't let herself abandon her duty int he face of this situation.

Because in this island, in this town, there was a home to whic Celica could return.

Under the command of the chair, the low number of the Ten Sages held, even at the best of times, was even further reduced as they were divided into two groups. Then, in order to neutralize and remove the seithr that was filling the island, Nine ran toward Ishana's town.

The Ten Sages were hurriedly leaving the Cathedral. Kazuma had been watching from the academy's hallway while resting his chin on his hand by the window frame.

Usually, many students would be walking back and forth through the hallways. As today was a holiday, it was quiet since nobody had a reason to be here. Unexpectedly in the uninhabited hallway, the sunlight pouring through the windows was warm.

In the vicinity of the Cathedral visible from the window, nobody could be seen anymore.

With such a critical situation in which it wouldn't be strange for the Black Beast to appear any moment, they must have thought that no person would purposely go into the Cathedral. All the members of the Mages' Guild who usually stood guard had also left in order to assist the Ten Sages.

Looking at it from here, the Cathedral was quite small, and very lovely. Seemingly having nothing to do with the magnificent organization Mages' Guild, it also looked like a chapel in the corner of a public park.

"If it's really like that, I'd be more willing to approach it."

While removing the hand which held his chin above the window frame, Kazuma raised the edges of his lips to make a bitter smile.

Appearing to be harmless, the deeper he went, there was bound to be strong barriers to protect it.

Nonetheless, it was laid out by humans in the end. There was no way an object that was made by human hands couldn't be broken by another human's hands.

"Well then. Guess I should I go."

Dutifully closing the opened window, Kazuma put both hands in the pockets of his trousers and started walking.

It was then when there was a noise of shoes hitting the hallway.

With a seemingly faint fragrance fluttering about, a short figure of a person appeared from one of the stairway's landings.

A bright colored robe which completely covered the entire body from head to toe; stunning platinum blonde hair overflowing from her crown. Big round eyeglasses, and clear green pupils behind it.

"Where are you going?"

To the voice that was like sickeningly sweet sugar candy, Kazuma vigilantly showed a smile.

"...I see you've come, Trinity Glassfille-san."

Part 4

Upon recognizing the figure, Kazuma found this development to be unexpected while simultaneously realizing that it was understandable.

He thought that if she were to come, it would be now.

As he stopped walking at the borderline between the hallway and staircase, Kazuma gazed at the girl who was like a character from a fairy-tale. Only a few hours ago, he had seen her off from his dormitory's room. Although the glint in Kazuma's eye shouldn't be visible from where Trinity stood.

"Did you follow me? When you show your true face like this, you're unexpectedly an ill-natured person."

When Kazuma meekly displayed a sarcastic smile, Trinity, seemingly sad, shook her head.

"It's not that I followed you. I've been waiting for you in the academy's courtyard. And then, I saw your figure from that window~."

"Oh, my goodness. I didn't notice you."

Trying to pass it off as joke, Kazuma shrugged his shoulders. Just because he got caught, it didn't affect his plans.

Seemingly understanding about it too, Trinity tried to talk while making a feeble smile.

"You're... planning to go to the Cathedral, aren't you."

"Why do you think that?"

"The other day, you spoke of it at the Great Library."

While trying to use a gentle and calm tone, Trinity spoke with dignity.

Kazuma raised his eyebrows.

"This is surprising. Does that mean you've been monitoring me since then?"

"Monitoring is..."

Finally in Trinity's tone of voice, the usual girlish delicate feelings blurred in.

Kazuma began to grin.

"The one who gave the instruction is Nine-san, right?"

Trinity remained tight-lipped, but she didn't deny it.

Kazuma smiled more and more deeply.

"Oh my, women are terrifying indeed. While monitoring me, you even invited me to drink tea."

As she was being told of ill-spoken things, Trinity's eyes quickly got seemingly sad and clouded.

If it were some time ago, he would be worried about it even if only for a little while; but now, it was unbearably amusing. About to begin to laugh unintentionally, Kazuma was barely able to gulp it down.

"I'm sorry, but I can't keep chatting with you forever. If you have a business, then please be quick. Even though things may appear different, I'm actually in a bit of a rush."

It was pleasant to ridicule Trinity, but there was a limit to the allowed time. It was unlikely for the Ten Sages to come back soon. But if there were any of the Mages' Guild's other workers wandering around, it would be a bother; so he couldn't let it happen.

"Go ahead", urged Kazuma as he tilted his head. Trinity stiffened her expression. With a bit of determination in her voice, she began to talk.

"Please don't go to the Cathedral."

"But I haven't said anything about going to Cathedral, have I?"

"Even so, you're planning to go there, right? It's forbidden to enter the Cathedral without permission. Besides, the door is currently locked... there's no excuse if you enter it on your own."

"Then I won't go inside. Too bad, I guess."

"Well then," nodded Kazuma as he started to walk to slip out past Trinity.

But before he passed her, his arm was grabbed by Trinity, forcibly restraining him.

Kazuma involuntarily stopped and turned his head. With both hands, Trinity grabbed Kazuma's arm tightly. Her desperate and serious gaze looked his way.

"...You can't go to the Cathedral."

Obstinately, she repeated it again.

Kazuma sighed and displayed his astonishment by shaking his head.

"Really, what an annoying person. It sounds like you think I will go to the Cathedral whatever the case."

"Then, can you please not go there?"

The sincere green eyes stared at Kazuma.

Those eyes must be somehow reflecting the current him. It wasn't worth worrying about, but Kazuma felt a little bit of interest. Nonetheless, it really wasn't worth worrying about. He shrugged his thin shoulders.

"If I say ' I won't go'... will you believe it?"

"No. Until the situation has been settled, please stay with me."

"Oh ho, an immediate reply. How heartless."

As for Trinity's serious tone of voice, Kazuma lightly retaliated as if laughing at it.

It was unbearably amusing every time her affectionate green eyes wavered as if hurt. Sadistic feeling gushed forth from his chest.

While he smirked, Kazuma shifted his provocative eyes from the gap in his bangs.

"Please don't make such a grim face. It's almost like it's telling me you'll use force if I refuse."

"If it's necessary... I plan to do so."

"Well, well. I couldn't imagine those words from the gentle Trinity Glassfille-san."

"KAZUMA-SAN!"

As if scolding a troublesome child, Trinity raised her voice. Though, it was still only Trinity after all; it was miles away from Nine's intimidating vigor.

A tone of voice that would make anyone with a normal conscience speechless in an instant; a tone that stirred up guilt.

"It's not like I know all about what Kazuma-san's trying to do~. However... your action will put Nine and the Ten Sages, also the Mages' Guild in meaningless chaos. If something further happened, not just Nine, there's a potential that the Mages' Guild itself would regard you as dangerous, you know?"

The eyes of Trinity held a sincere look as she tried to persuade him.

Looking back at her, Kazuma laughed as if making fun of it.

"You seem to say that I'm the source of all troubles. Unless I had opened that hole in the barrier, unless I had lured the seithr in through the hole, there's no reason to suspect me."

"No. Seithr has flown in because of Kazuma-san."

Trinity declared her denial. That tone of voice wasn't accusing in the least; it was transparent as fresh water.

"Last night, you informed Celica-san about the tear in the barrier. And then you guided Celica-san so she could use it to get outside."

"You're speaking as if you saw it."

Kazuma cut the conversation to tease her, but Trinity didn't respond to it.

She knew. She did know. The reason Kazuma took Celica out from the island, and the words he used to tempt Celica.

Proving it logically wasn't necessary. Trinity knowing about it was the whole truth, so Kazuma also wasn't going to deny it anymore now.

Trinity tried to moderate her voice a bit and continued.

"Celica-san has a particular ability from when she was small. That ability somehow appears to have a characteristic of suppressing seithr... Therefore even if a hole opened in the barrier, seithr wouldn't be able to get into Ishana. However, since you took Celica-san outside..."

The force which opposed seithr was no longer there, and Ishana's air became polluted just like the outside world.

"Hmm," muttered Kazuma as the eyes behind his bangs squinted. Curiosity sparkled in those eyes.

"That is convenient. Because of it, those eyesore, the Ten Sages, got driven out from the Cathedral."

He wasn't aware of Celica's physical constitution, but it was

fortunate indeed.

This was surely fate. Also true for when he met Celica by chance and encountered Terumi. Standing here at this moment was also a moment of fate.

With his uplifting feeling steadily increasing, Kazuma embraced that thought in his mind.

As Kazuma appeared to be somewhat enjoying himself, Trinity stared at him intensely with a reproachful look.

"Don't say such a thing like eyesores. She and the others are now desperately doing their best in order to protect the island we live in."

Strength was put into Trinity's fingers which were gripping Kazuma's arm.

It was the unreliable grip of a powerless girl. He didn't feel even a tiny speck of pain. But strangely, Kazuma sensed an undeniable spirit. The smile was erased from his face.

Trinity lifted her eyebrows, fully raising her round chin, and looked up to Kazuma to urge him.

"Do you understand, Kazuma-san? If you make the mistake, you'll get expelled from the academy or even from the island. You may even be given a more severe punishment."

As if to say that she couldn't deal with those outcomes, Trinity's voice wavered. In a gentle and pleasantly soft voice, she tried to persuade him as if she was praying.

"I... regard Kazuma-san as an important friend. Certainly, Nine can't keep her eyes off you like you've said～. And I'm also worried about your behaviors. Even if you call it monitoring, I feel like it can't be helped. But it's definitely not anything for you to be cautious about. I've just always been worried about you..."

Her green eyes became wet with emotion.

Kazuma wondered if she was about to cry, but although tears were accumulating in Trinity's eyes, they didn't drop.

"For some time, something has drastically changed in Kazuma-san. It's like you got mixed up with something mysterious... You appear to always have a dark shadow beside you. It's like it's taking the Kazuma Kuvaru-san I know to a place of no return... I've always been uneasy."

"The Kazuma Kuvaru... you know?"

Kazuma briefly repeated Trinity's words. It was downright strange sounding.

Kazuma Kuvaru. It was the only name representing himself; but it felt very empty and worthless now.

He wondered if that was the 'place of no return' Trinity was talking about.

Trinity's hands pulled Kazuma's arm to hold it tight.

The distance between them grew shorter. The mood which Trinity was clad in was similar to the smell of sweet candy or flowers; it grazed his skin and made him feel uneasy.

The persistent clear eyes that had been truly sincere were reflecting Kazuma, not letting him go.

"The Kazuma-san I know is a kind person. He's indiscriminately gentle toward any person. And If I greeted him, he'd always answer with a smile. Although I speak sluggishly like this, he'd always listen properly. I understand that you feel bothered about losing your memory, but the memory-less you is a great person."

It was obvious that Trinity spoke her true feelings unhesitatingly.

And similarly, it was also obvious that she unhesitatingly trusted Kazuma.

He would definitely realize it if they spoke of it. Her strong trusting demeanor gave off sincerity that was enough to make even Kazuma

surprised.

"I beg of you. Please... don't do anything dangerous anymore. Other than that, I'll do anything in my power no matter what it is. So...!"

Trinity's hands clung to Kazuma's arm tighter.

It looked like she firmly vowed in her heart never to release him. If he got loose of her hands, there would be no returning again for Kazuma. He harbored such a belief.

Kazuma didn't answer her immediately. As if astonished, as if admiring her resolve. Similar feelings but with different sentiments; several of them probably got mixed up.

After a little while, Kazuma deeply sighed and let the tension out from his shoulders as if he was exhausted.

"...Understood. I understand very well, Trinity Glassfille-san."

As Kazuma spoke like he was giving up, with a relief to the point where she would burst into tears any moment, Trinity's expression broadened.

"Then...!"

"Yes."

As gently as he could, Kazuma smiled at her.

"You are a hopeless fool."

No sooner had he finished, Kazuma held up his hand in front of Trinity's face.

Before the large green eyes could blink in bewilderment... an invisible shock wave fired from Kazuma's hand blew Trinity away.

Like a ragdoll, thrown away by its owner, the fragile woman's body crashed into the wall beside the staircase. The impact made a dull crashing noise; and as if dragging it longer, she collapsed to the cold floor.

Without even groaning in pain, she lost consciousness.

While looking at the helplessly collapsed Trinity, Kazuma put both hands into his trousers' pockets again. Casually stepping toward her, he looked down on the disordered platinum blonde hair which was falling to the floor.

"Geez~, you're really foolish. Someday, you'll lose your life because of that stupidity, you know? It'd be better to be more careful. ...Oh, you can't hear me already. Hahaha."

He burst out laughing. While his laughter resounded loudly within the hallway, Kazuma leisurely descended the academy's staircase he frequently utilised.

Chapter 6: Voice of Emerald Evil

Part 1

When he exited the academy's school building into the courtyard, he thought that the weather outside felt nice.

The sky appeared hazier than usual. There were signs of it turning slightly dark.

Facing the whole city, he wondered if the Ten Sages in charge of purifying the seithr had produced any results. The way things were going, their hands would still be full for a while.

Kazuma went across the silent courtyard, a strange atmosphere compared with the normal bustle of the Mages' Guild. He headed toward the Cathedral which was standing centrally.

The meandering path was refreshing as if it was a promenade through a forest.

Lying in wait in the middle, the Cathedral was just as small as when viewed from the hallway's window. It didn't seem like the sort of place the Mages' Guild would store their classified information.

Similar to a chapel, the entrance housed a large pair of wooden double doors. Just as Trinity had said, it was securely locked.

But for this island that had been raising magicians, things like physical locks only had the significance of a sign which had 'No entry without permission' written on it. With a short incantation and a small pattern drawn with his fingertip the lock fell, allowing Kazuma to continue all too soon.

After he got inside, he closed the doors. As he proceeded, he noticed that the place was silent as though it was a different

airspace.

The air inside the building was a little warm compared to the outdoors.

Kazuma went in further. It seemed there was nobody inside. Granted it was a matter of course.

In the history of the Mages' Guild, today was the most critical situation. During such circumstances, there was no way that someone with knowledge of security magic would just be stood guard here.

And rather, the guardsmen for Cathedral were in charge of giving warning.

As there was nothing but a large hall on the Cathedral's ground floor, there was no reason to get rid of intruders. What was absolutely forbidden to enter was what was beyond here, the Cathedral's underground.

On the door leading to underground, there was a severely secure barrier imbued. If he were to carelessly approach it, he wouldn't get out with merely a scratch.

The guardsmen were instructed to warn anyone who carelessly approached the barrier.

Kazuma stood in front of the entrance which was leading to the underground.

"...This looks troublesome."

What was lying in wait for Kazuma was a wooden door which was heavy from the looks of it. It appeared it was enveloped in a slightly white haze.

Judging by the heightened magical power that was visible, it was a barrier.

Kazuma wasn't poor at cancelling barrier magic during class, but this one was a different case. When he cautiously stretched out his

hand... he felt an uncomfortable feeling on his fingers.

Just by standing close to a strong barrier, it would burn a person's skin in order to repel them. However, this door was nothing like that.

Kazuma's fingers were hanging close to the door while he pondered over whether to touch it or not. But immediately, he boldly placed his hand on the door.

His breath was taken away reflexively. He had prepared for the appropriate impact and damage.

But even after three whole seconds had elapsed, Kazuma was still silently grabbing the door's knob.

When he pushed against it, the door opened.

The barrier was still functioning but Kazuma's hand broke through it and opened the door.

"What's the meaning of this...?"

Even when he muttered, no one answered.

Although he was confused, Kazuma narrowly slipped through the door and stepped inside. It was baffling, but if he could get in, then he wouldn't hesitate.

Inside the door was continuation of the hallway which had an arched ceiling. In the inner part, there was stairway leading downward, underground.

The magical lights which were floating at fixed intervals illuminated Kazuma's path.

As he went underground, the structure became more and more expansive. On the upper level, there was a meeting room and a room used to observe various data; both were used by all members of Mages' Guild.

Moreover as he went further downward, a meeting room that

sometimes had been used for the Ten Sages' ceremonies appeared.

On each level, there were barriers erected whose strength matched the ability of the human who was authorized to utilize it. They weren't such things that could be lifted by the likes of students at all.

But even so, Kazuma's body was able to continue ahead. The barriers couldn't stop him; as if he was slipping through the mesh of a net that was supposed to catch intruders.

When the long stairway heading downwards into the depths of the cathedral ended, he arrived at an elevator which was controlled by magic. He also passed the barrier which had been erected there.

As if he was being guided——Kazuma arrived at the lowest level of the Cathedral.

After exiting the elevator, the hallway's ceiling grew tall which made it unlikely that it was underground. As expected, a wooden door awaited beyond that point.

Like a stamped seal, a magic circle appeared on the door.

No one but the Ten Sages was permitted to come here. Moreover, since a suitable magical power was needed, a barrier with ruthless degree of security was applied in such a way that if somebody were to touch it by mistake, they wouldn't be spared. It would result in death.

Shutting his mouth tightly, Kazuma touched the last guardian with a sullen look.

His fingers touched the wooden surface. After sliding them across the door as though he was tracing something, his palm finally touched it completely.

What he felt on his skin was just the firmness on an old, normal tree. It felt like if he were holding an axe, he could easily tear it down.

There was no handle on the door. As he pushed, it slowly opened as

expected.

Of course, being able to get in here made even Kazuma frown in confusion.

Why couldn't the Cathedral's barriers stop Kazuma? Not even once had he used cancelling magic, but he had still managed to arrive at the lowest level.

"It's like... I'm being invited in."

Not matching its aging appearance, the door opened silently as Kazuma passed through it while he muttered.

Beyond the door was a breathtakingly vast circular room.

The ceiling was even taller than the hallway's. Although there wasn't any magical lighting device floating, the whole room seemed to be slightly luminescent as it was faintly bright.

The floor was tiled with mosaics; a stretched large flower-like pattern was depicted from the center to the outside. If it wasn't a flower, it might be a sun or flame pattern.

While stepping forward to the outermost petals, Kazuma looked around the surroundings.

Although the inside of the room was absurdly spacious, it was empty. It was nothing but a deserted room. Rather than being a place of storage for classified information, it was as if some kind of ceremony were about to begin at the place.

The drifting air had a different kind of coolness from the outside. It might be because there was no window and he didn't know how far he'd come that he had completely lost track of time.

When he took a step forward, the small, hard noise of footsteps disappeared like it was absorbed into the floor.

And at the same time, he felt the beating inside his chest accelerate.

"Here... The Azure is..."

Kazuma must be thinking that he had obtained the means to reach the Azure. Before he noticed it, Kazuma had been intending to get the Azure itself.

It wasn't reasonable anymore. It went beyond reasoning and it felt like instinct.

The inside of the room was even warmer than the surface. It was like he was within the warmth of a living being. The faint drifting heat slowly agitated Kazuma's spirits.

But for some reason, while walking further in, Kazuma also gradually became impatient.

There was nothing here. If there was no document or data, a map indicating where the Azure was wouldn't exist.

But it was impossible that there was nothing here. Terumi definitely said it was here.

"Terumi-san!"

Inside the giant, empty room, Kazuma raised his voice.

His voice echoed off the ceiling.

"I managed to get inside the Cathedral. Where is the Mages' Guild's classified information!?"

Kazuma hadn't expected it to be here; it was Terumi who said it. But if that was the case, what could this vast, unoccupied room hold?

He looked up at the ceiling as if to search for Terumi's presence. While he looked around the room, little by little Kazuma's steps became wider as he walked toward the inner part of the room.

It was when he arrived at the center of the hall, he heard it.

"Soooo, you finally arrived~. Don't make me wait so long, Kazuma-chan."

Terumi's voice could be heard.

Taken aback, Kazuma looked around the surroundings. However, Terumi's figure was nowhere to be seen. Although there was no spot in which to hide, he couldn't even find a part of his shadow.

Despite that, Terumi's voice got even more audible.

"I got worried since you're so late, y'know? I've been wondering if you don't care about the Azure anymore and instead went along with those women to have a fun time enjoying tea～ ...while forgetting everything completely."

"Give me a break. Don't say such a disgusting thing."

Attempting to face his invisible friend, Kazuma showed an unambitious smile.

Kazuma sharpened his glare to search around the room.

Whenever Terumi started to talk, no doubt some kind of a situation was developing.

The few days from his first meeting with Terumi, each time he appeared, Kazuma's world had little by little been changing. The old days which were like invisible labyrinth had turned into a path.

It would be the same this time, surely. Bearing such feeling, Kazuma answered to the empty sky.

"Didn't I make a promise with you that I would definitely reach it? ...Besides, above all, I want to recover it."

In low voice, Kazuma spoke of his real motive. At that moment, the frivolous smile had already disappeared from his mouth.

He no longer hesitated. Inside Kazuma's chest, there was only a yearning toward the Azure.

"Really? You really want to get it back? Obtaining the Azure means you can't ever go back. Even if you regretted it, you wouldn't be able to let it go. You really still fine even like that?"

Terumi's question, asked at this late stage, instead seemed to encourage Kazuma's thought. Naturally, Kazuma didn't intend to go against it.

"There won't be any regret. I'll obtain it. All this time, I've been wishing only to have it."

The real him.

Who he should be.

Although even his shadow wasn't in sight, he knew that Terumi was grinning.

"Then... look. It's just right there, isn't it?"

"Right there?"

Questioning, Kazuma again looked around the surrounding.

The truly vast room where he stood alone was silent, as if time had stopped.

It might be his imagination, but currently, the flow of time here felt slow.

"It's there. Just right there. Look, it's really close to you..."

The voice that came from the strained throat teased Kazuma on purpose. It whispered to him from awfully close.

"It's... below your feet."

Then, he was attacked by goose bumps.

Rather than a chill that ran on his spine, it was a sensation like a flaming hot snake crawling up.

Kazuma followed the urging from the snake on his spine and looked down on his feet.

Before he knew it, both of Kazuma's feet had arrived firmly at the very center of the hall. The core of the large flower, sun, and

swirling flame of a pattern.

The floor was polished, just like a mirror. There was a reflection of him looking back up. His eyes met the eyes of the other side's image.

Disordered, long bangs, slender feet and thin shoulders, a familiar academy uniform. It was the usual him.

As if drawn in by his reflection, Kazuma put one knee down to the spot and bent over.

Toward the circular center of the mosaic tiles, he gently placed his hand.

That instant——.

"...!"

His cry didn't come out.

As both his and the image's palms touched each other, his body trembled as if petrified. He got frozen on the spot.

Travelling up his arm, via the hand that touched the floor, something was entering Kazuma.

Like a storm that caused surging waves, it was a tremendous torrent of information.

Part 2

Seven years ago... Mage's Guild, Ishana, barrier... the safest island in the world.

Relius Clover... dream... Shuuichirou Ayatsuki... white haired man... 'someone' madly laughing.

...The room with a Cauldron.

Phrases, history, time... Black Beast... Past... A hundred years...

Kazuma Kuvaru.

Yuuki Terumi.

... .

The surging information hit Kazuma's body with the impact of thrown stones. It rushed into his brain.

Behind his eyes, sparks were scattering. With dizziness eating at his soul, it was almost like his flesh was melting into something new.

He wasn't allowed to reject it or surrender. The enormous information was flowing forcefully on its own; just like a full glass of water, drunk in one gulp, soaking inside Kazuma.

If he were to express that feeling with a word... then it would be ecstasy. A trembling pleasant feeling that struck him into a small trance.

Similar to the feeling when someone inserted the last piece of a

puzzle. Similar to the feeling when slightly separated shadows overlapped into one.

Desired objects going into the desired place. It was such a coherent pleasure.

"That's why... That's why I... had to come here."

While slowly removing his palm from the floor, Kazuma's lips moved slightly as he muttered. Not even a slight doubt remained in that voice anymore.

Likewise, the thin and tall body slowly stood up.

Right after raising his face, he looked directly at the man standing in front of him.

Terumi was there.

As usual, from inside the low hood which was intended to hide his expression, eyes like those of snake aiming at its prey were looking at Kazuma. The splitting mouth, which was about to smile, spoke.

"It would be meaningless to go anywhere but here. You can't find place like this even if you search the rest of the world after all."

"And Relius Clover... the man who created me knew it from the very beginning, didn't he?"

Kazuma remembered everything.

No, he'd recovered everything was more appropriate.

That was because the memories he had to remember never existed inside Kazuma.

Seven years ago, the day when he arrived at Ishana as an amnesiac was truly the first day in Kazuma's life. That day, that time, Kazuma's memory started.

Kazuma wasn't tied to nature unlike a born child.

He was an existence manufactured by Relius Clover by making full use of magic, alchemy, and science.

Not remembering anything and the way he healed at a bizarre rate were also none other than modifications made by Relius.

He gained form as an existence eight years ago. A few months later, he was transported to Ishana.

His consciousness as an existence woke seven years ago. And then for the following seven years, he continued to live academy life as Kazuma Kuvaru.

Then why was Kazuma created?

That was because he would become the man before his eyes... Yuuki Terumi's body.

"January 1st six years ago. During Relius Clover's trial experiment, the Black Beast appeared. I was around during the time, you see. That time, my body went *poof*. My spirit form also got injured and took five whole years to heal. Then I asked that damn Relius for another body... in short, he told me to find you. Y'know there's a ridiculous barrier set around Ishana, right? What kind of joke was that? It ain't funny."

Although his mouth was torn into a crescent moon shape, Terumi cursed while speaking. Rough footsteps resounded as Terumi walked around Kazuma with an unnaturally slow pace.

"To add to my troubles, you didn't even recognize me. You're the first body to ever give me a pain in the ass."

"That... must be troublesome."

Kazuma spontaneously showed a smile. There was a hint of detest somewhere in Terumi smile.

Looking at Kazuma from below his hood, Terumi snorted to show he wasn't amused.

Trying to ignore what he had heard, Kazuma dropped his gaze to

his feet.

He now truly understood what object the mosaic tiles were depicting. What the crude picture was indicating was some kind of bright red lava he saw in his dream the other day.

——The Cauldron.

"Until a short while ago, I couldn't even imagine that a Cauldron could exist in Ishana. Then again, I didn't even know of the existence of the objects known as Cauldrons."

Kazuma made noises as he hit the tile on the center of the room with his tiptoe.

The Cauldron was an object similar to a volcano's crater. It had been excavated from deep underground by humanity's hands. Inside, red flames were dancing as if denying living beings. There was an airspace called the Boundary stretched out across the core.

And there was one purpose for the core.

Master Units. They were omnipotent existences whose only purpose was to keep observing all of space-time and all existences within. They were often likened to god.

So in short, the Boundary was a domain ruled by god.

"Since the time the Mages' Guild was established... No, since roughly thousands of years ago, this Cauldron has existed here. It has been maintaining the Mages' Guild's status and presence."

It felt impressive thinking about it. Kazuma had great admiration toward the collection of tiles below his feet.

Having a Cauldron meant one would be able to monopolize the strength of an omnipotent god.

Of course, monopolizing was nothing but a means to an end. However, the power was enough for a single organization to preserve overwhelming superiority over their hidden part of history.

"The thing's a fake made by humans. It ain't the true Cauldron."

Standing at the center across from Kazuma, Terumi also looked down at his feet.

Originally, the Cauldron had a form like a crater holding sea of flames. This one imitated it; an artificial Cauldron created by mankind in order to draw on the power of the Boundary.

Kazuma and Terumi stood over the middle of that crater.

"Yes, I agree. The original isn't like this."

Kazuma himself had never set eyes at the actual Cauldron. But still, the knowledge which had been inserted into his brain understood about it.

"But it's still important. The ability to make contact with the Boundary alone is enough."

While speaking, Kazuma's vision wandered around to view the whole Cauldron.

When he looked up at the wide and tall ceilings, there were things like hooks extending from the walls supporting strange engravings midair. It was just like some kind of coffin.

Kazuma recited the characters engraved there as he read them.

"*...When light emitted from heaven scorches a city, the goddess of destruction and creation will be born...*"

"Huh, so you can read it."

"Well, I'm a student of the Mages' Guild after all."

Although Kazuma replied to Terumi's teasing with a wry smile, even if he made use of the knowledge taught to him for seven years, he didn't understand the significance of these words and the coffin's true identity.

However, even if this place was an artificial imitation, it was surely

connected with the Boundary. He understood that this place was the very thing of Mages' Guild's secrecy itself.

"...I had to recall that I'm Terumi-san's body. Nah, maybe it's better to say that I definitely had to realize it. And you couldn't tell me since I had to be aware on my own."

Kazuma spoke while facing Terumi. He verified the pieces of information transmitted from the Boundary one by one.

It was like some kind of a ceremony. No, that itself was a ceremony.

Body and soul. For the purpose of overlapping both shadows into one.

Terumi extended his arm that was as thin as Kazuma's.

"It's useless if I told you who *I* am. You gotta recognize who I am with your own eyes."

"Hence, the Boundary's power was needed."

The Cauldron was connected with the Boundary. All kinds of wisdom existed in the Boundary. Even the knowledge about Terumi's previous body.

Because he had come in contact with the Boundary, Kazuma had obtained all information regarding Terumi.

The air suddenly grew dense. Before long, they were able to sense another party's breathing.

It was really dense even when compared to the atmosphere between Kazuma and Terumi.

It was hard to tell which direction the heat came from.

Kazuma took a short breath.

"Ishana, the world's safest city. There is a Cauldron intended to connect with the Boundary here. A control system to keep foreign enemies away and a barrier to thwart the Black Beast and seithr

also exist. That was why Relius Clover chose this island to store me."

Terumi chuckled.

"Thanks to that, I got in big trouble... But on the good side, since you're here everything was completed in one fell swoop. That's Professor Relius for you; way to make me feel indebted."

A shadow extended from Kazuma's feet.

Similarly, a shadow also extended from Terumi's feet.

Both of them thought it was trivial however abnormal that scene was.

Kazuma stared at Terumi and spoke.

"Like you promised, I have recovered everything."

Terumi stared at Kazuma and spoke.

"And I'm also a free man at last. Good work."

There was but only one single lump of shadow now. Although the two each faced a different entity, there was a pretense that both had the same face and were also the same individual.

Two kinds of mucus that were put in the same vessel being slowly mixed by a thin stick; such a feeling was surrounding Kazuma and Terumi.

It was by no means disgusting. Rather, it was pleasant.

Because it was the appearance he desired.

Because it was the role he sought.

(That's right. I've always...)

Wished for it. About his true self. About the meaning of his existence. About the necessity to keep on living.

And they were all here. If this didn't please him, then what would?

"——Aah, it's here."

"Yes, I know."

Toward the presence that slightly grazed their skin, Terumi and Kazuma simultaneously turned around.

In front of them was the only entrance to this innermost room.

"The brute has appeared."

It was unclear who had sneered.

Between the pair of doors that had been left wide open, a familiar small silhouette stood.

Part 3

"Kazuma Kuvaru... isn't it."

Like a sharpened blade, a small shadow spoke in a sharp, cold voice.

A stature about as tall as a child, triangular ears protruding from the top of the head, and two swaying tails behind its back.

The beastkin swordsman, Tomonori.

The other day, his hands had carried a pair of short swords. They were now gripping a large and heavy sword. Stored in jet black sheath, it held a strange pressure.

While focusing on Kazuma, Tomonori unsheathed the sword without any hesitation. The distinct noise of the sword being unleashed echoed coldly. Catching the strange glow of the room which resembled moon light, the silver blade gleamed brightly.

"Well, well. Umm... Tomonori-san, is it? You still give such a vicious greeting."

Raising both hands above his shoulders as if giving up, Kazuma gave an unmotivated smile.

That moment, Tomonori's already sharp eyes shone even more grimly.

"...As I thought."

With bitter regret oozing, Tomonori muttered with hoarse, low voice.

"I should have killed you back then and not feared being

discovered..."

"Oh no, killing me? Please don't say such scary things. Even if I look this way, I dislike violence, you see?"

Still raising both hands, Kazuma tried to play innocent. But as if not caring about it, Tomonori displayed his thirst for blood.

"This time I will surely... kill you."

The announcement itself was like a blade.

The ruthlessness would freeze the muscles of any normal person and paralyze their feet with fear. However, Kazuma just looked at Terumi and tilted his neck in puzzlement.

"Whew, he looks fully motivated. What a bother."

"There's other places you can use as your scratching post y'know, lil' cat～?"

Terumi pointed his chin while blatantly provoking him.

But Tomonori didn't waste unnecessary words. Still silent, he measured his reach. Not the reach to intimidate, but the reach to kill.

"Ooh ignoring me, I see. Or maybe you don't understand human language? Hyahhaha."

"It's understandable. After all, it's forbidden to enter this place. And yet he's still hesitating. He's really one confused stray cat."

Agreeing with the sneering Terumi, Kazuma played innocent while making a face like he was truly astonished. A cruel smile showed on his lips.

"This is troubling. If he goes on rampage in this place, the Ten Sages might suspect something. But... well, maybe this is a good way to warm up."

"Hey, don't get carried away. My bad but I'll pass on playing with a

cat!"

Toward Terumi's mockery, Tomonori slightly drew his nose. But without saying anything back, he instead pushed off from the cold floor and rushed in like the wind.

He pulled the large sword far behind. As he landed, he made a straight horizontal slash in an attempt to cleave Kazuma's torso.

Kazuma jumped backward.

The slash grazed Kazuma's jacket as it cut through the air.

The cat's piercing eyes followed Kazuma. Pursuing faster than before, he slashed a second time, diagonally.

While still leaping to retreat, Kazuma cast a short spell. Magical wind blew from the ground and weakened the attack. He used that gap to escape from the cold blade.

"Haha... hahaha. I see, I understand it now..."

He was thrilled. The thirst for blood that was pointed toward him felt tremendously pleasant.

He could move his body at will.

The confusion and panic when he previously encountered Tomonori in the city were nowhere to be seen. Rather, this situation was entertaining, enjoyable. Naturally, he burst into a hearty laugh.

"More... You should put more effort in now. Don't you want to kill me? It should be easy. I'm just an incompetent student. I can't wield weapons like you do."

"Don't get carried away... you monster."

Lowering his posture, Tomonori growled.

The hatred lingering in his voice tickled Kazuma's spinal cord again.

"Fuh... hahaha. Monster? Me? A monster? Pardon me, but how can

you say I'm a monster? I'm just pathetic mouse that can only run away, khukuku."

Desires welled up from the bottom of the laughing Kazuma as he jeered. He was thirsting. For joy, pleasure, fear, terror, lament, and hatred.

Each time he looked into the eyes of the beast that held such a chilling murderous intent, his thirst was satisfied by a drop. That feeling was very, very... irresistible.

Tomonori thrust his sword horizontally.

Kazuma twisted his upper body and the sharp assault only grazed him.

At the same time, Terumi jumped from behind. He stretched his long, thin arms and grabbed Tomonori's arm before he could retract his blade.

"Man, you're boring... You're gonna get killed, y'know?"

He whispered the threat while eerily smiling.

The next moment, Terumi pulled Tomonori's arm and kicked his abdomen which was covered by soft fur.

"Guh!"

A painful groan leaked from the cat's mouth. The small figure was blown toward the hall's wall.

Tomonori managed to turn his body in midair and landed on the wall. Using the momentum, he swiftly sprung back at Kazuma with an even faster speed.

A strike. Kazuma dodged as they passed. During the counter attack, the blade slashed Kazuma's arm.

"Ugh...!"

The sudden attack made Kazuma let out a distorted voice of pain.

When he held his arm, something dripped from inside the torn clothes. The wound was deep.

Again, Tomonori went for a strike. This time the blade was going for a vertical slash.

There was no time to dodge. Kazuma crossed both hands on front of his face and cast a defensive spell while withdrawing with a large jump.

But the barrier was smashed by the blade. A shrill noise echoed like a metal being violently crushed. The broken barrier sent its user, Kazuma, flying backwards.

"Guah...!"

Kazuma was thrown to the hard floor back first. His head hit the floor, hard.

Where the tip of Tomonori's sword had connected, a small wound ran along Kazuma's crossed arm. Red liquid welled at the wound site before finally beginning to drip a bit.

"Tch. Damn cat brute. Now you've done it."

After he landed with a particularly light noise beside Kazuma, Terumi spoke cheerfully though he was also bitter. He grabbed Kazuma's arm and pulled him up as he spoke.

While holding his still dizzy head, Kazuma was somehow able to stand up straight. He felt a numbing pain in his injured arm; and topping that, a burning feeling.

Looking at his arm, Kazuma frowned with a dubious expression.

"What's... with this wound?"

The deep sword cut he received to his arm should have become shallow by the time his barrier had been destroyed. Conversely, the wound wouldn't heal even a bit.

Because of Kazuma's body's self-healing ability, the bleeding of his

wounds should have already stopped the moment they started. Without any visible sign of healing, the blood continued to pour like it wouldn't ever heal.

"Looks like you'vee got some interesting tricks going on."

Terumi scowled since he also realized Kazuma's unusual situation.

As if to put down Terumi's voice, Tomonori once again readied his sword.

"It seems to have an effect."

The low, hoarse voice of the cat spoke as if he understood something.

Kazuma and Terumi simultaneously fixed their eyes on the tiny swordsman.

A fearless feeling faintly appeared on Tomonori's calm expression.

"...Hihi'irokane."

The whisper wasn't directed to Kazuma nor Terumi, but to the sword in his hands.

The sword responded to the call. The sword, that was a little larger than the cat-type beastkin, beat once as if pulsing. Next, the shape changed like it had been released from its restraints.

That shape was just like a beast's claws. The main part of the blade, which had multiplied to three, transformed into a rather grotesque shape, unbecoming of a sword.

"Hihi'irokane!?"

The one who raised his voice in shock was Terumi.

"That damn cat... He borrowed a huge toy!"

Beside the screaming Terumi, Kazuma also cautiously put himself on guard.

Hihi'irokane. Beside flesh, the sword would also eventually rip out the dwelling soul.

The sword had directly cut Kazuma's flesh. It also had done the same to Terumi's spirit form.

When further examined, Terumi's arm certainly had a cut wound in the same area as Kazuma's.

A wound to his spirit form wouldn't be easily healed. Furthermore, Kazuma's wound wasn't healing too.

"This looks... bad..."

The smile vanished from Kazuma's expression.

Blood flowing out along his thin arm. It dripped to the floor tiles from his fingertips. Red spots were engraved at his feet.

Tomonori raised the giant transformed sword and jumped low like a gale.

He swung it diagonally downward. Accompanied by a thunderous roar which was like the groan of air surge, despite managing to dodge the attack, the shockwave-like wind pressure rocked Kazuma's whole body.

Even though the blade didn't graze him, the sword's pressure made it hard to even breathe. His expression turned to anguish.

"If I got hit directly... Would I die, then?"

Kazuma had fallen over like he had been thrown to the floor. He then tried to hold his bloody arm as he stood up while glancing at Terumi.

With a crooked smile, Terumi clicked his tongue. He glared at Tomonori while snorting.

"Wanna try?"

"Haha, don't joke around."

"...Quite a talkative man."

Tomonori spoke cold and severely. The sword in his hands growled. Even though he only fixed his stance.

"That chattering will also end here."

"Ooh, scary. ... Oh wait, now's not the time to say that, is it?"

Kazuma pulled his lips and made a smile. But frankly, he couldn't afford to laugh. A rough noise resounded as his feet grazed the floor while he stepped back.

At this rate, it would truly be the end. He refused to accept it. Even though it was finally starting.

(Just... what's starting?)

Vaguely, Kazuma questioned himself.

Wrong. Rather than Kazuma, it was Terumi who had something to start.

No, whether it was Terumi or Kazuma, the line was awfully unclear.

The cat ran. Rather than a slash, the large and sharp blade of Hihi'irokane bore down on Kazuma as if to gouge him.

By a hair's breadth, Kazuma avoided the first attack.

But the sword's pressure grazed his thigh. That alone gave him pain like his flesh had been torn.

Following it, Hihi'irokane approached.

Kazuma regained his broken posture while raising his eyes to focus on the gale slash.

It was that moment.

"...!?"

His body shook violently.

From his feet, an irresistible urge quickly rising up.

Lured by instinct, Kazuma dropped his gaze.

There was the room's central part. No, it was the Cauldron's centre.

It was unknown whether what was coming up was the Boundary's power or the dwelling madness within his body.

The hopelessly uplifting feeling whispered.

‘'——Now, kill.

"Yes, I understand. I've understood everything. I've taken it back. No.. more like it has returned. Isn't that right?"

It was a really serene sensation.

It was supposed to be that way. Because now, at this very moment, the rightful soul went into its rightful place. Completely established, without any hint of error.

"... Hi, haha... haha... hyahhahahahaha."

Aah, can't stop laughing. It's pleasant, really pleasant.

Kazuma faced Tomonori who was coming in straight line. As if reacting to it, he spread out his arms.

"HURRY UP AND DIE ALREADY, YOU SHITTY CAAAAAAT!"

The piercing laughter changed; to a joyful voice full of ecstasy.

"———OUROBOROS!!"

Together with the call, the airspace on both of Terumi's sides warped.

Eating and tearing the space that was supposed to be empty, chains possessing serpent heads appeared.

The serpent chains traveled through the air in a straight line... and diagonally from left and right, they pierced Tomonori's chest while he rushed toward them like the wind.

Part 4

Like meat being minced, a jarring noise was heard.

The body of the cat-man that had leapt with giant sword in hand was dragged by the shockwave that ate into his chest before it fell to the floor.

Although he had at least managed to avoid falling down clumsily, it was obvious from his pained expression that Tomonori had received a considerably severe wound. He somehow used the giant, clawed sword to regain his balance.

"HYAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! That's it... Attaboy! THIS is the feeling I'm talking about! I searched for six years to get this! Now it's back!"

Largely bending his body backward, Kazuma laughed even louder. His voice swirled on the tall ceiling. The commotion made the air inside the room tremble.

On the other side of his disordered bangs, Kazuma opened his eyes wide. The atrocious glare in the glint of his eyes resembled that of a reptile's. The grim expression warped and looked down on Tomonori.

"Khukuku... Nice posture, lil' cat~. What did you say? Killing me? Hihahaha. Fine, do it if you can!"

Again, the airspace on Kazuma's sides were torn as serpent chains rushed out. The squirming chains which resembled a living creature trailed in the air and rushed toward Tomonori.

Holding up his battered body, Tomonori prepared his sword. With a movement faster than that of the irregular chains, he jumped to dodge them. Using the gigantic sword, he shoved off the hungry

shadow of the fangs.

At the same time, Tomonori leapt and chased after Kazuma before forcefully using Hihi'irokane to mow him down.

"Whoops!"

The intense slash severed the air.

Kazuma pulled himself up using a new chain, passing up above Tomonori, and went to the opposite side. Immediately after, he let out a sharp, spear-like chain. The tip of the serpent's head grazed Tomonori's shoulder as they passed each other, tearing it.

Stern anger appeared on the cat's face. The three-pronged sword roared and severed the crooked neck of the chain that had grazed his shoulder.

Deep underground, the unfolding battle that hadn't cought anyone above the surface's attention appeared to last forever.

Kazuma's chains scattered Tomonori's blood-stained fur. They pursued Tomonori's slow movement to scrape his flesh.

Not only the blade, the pressure from Tomonori's sword also went for a slashing attack toward the escaping Kazuma. The flowing artificial blood it had collected scattered along the floor and wall.

In that moment, the one who made the conclusive movement was Kazuma and his chains.

It had been several times Tomonori had kicked the floor and dashed in order to make a slash.

Responding to it, Kazuma launched two chains from the front. But before the two serpent heads were cleared away by the sword, he naturally wriggled their body to force them through Tomonori.

Ignoring both of his sides, Tomonori instantly closed the distance. Pure intent to kill showed in his sharp pupils.

The back that carried such frank tenacity was pierced from behind

by the surrounding chains in one breath.

Wet noises resounded.

"Ugh...!"

A groan from dull pain leaked out of Tomonori's gritted teeth.

However, the beastkin swordsman seized the pair of chains which had pierced his body, raising his speed he continued to run without faltering. Taking along the blazing momentum, he swung his sword down at Kazuma.

"Tch!"

Kazuma pulled on the chains. However, Tomonori's hand stopped him. The cold blade touched Kazuma's nape.

Just before that, Kazuma instantly concentrated defensive magic to a point and cast it.

A noise of metal clashing was dispersed, along with sparks.

As Kazuma's magic took the blow, what got repelled was... a small sword Tomonori drew with the hand that had been seizing the chains.

Kazuma noticed it too late.

"I'll... kill you!"

Tomonori's voice was hoarse as it was mixed with blood. Something even deeper than desire was boiling in it.

Something called faith had to be there. Something called pride had to be there. Something called devotion had to be there.

"HIHI'IROKANE!!"

The hand, which was large when compared to a human's, swung the incredibly huge sword that had been hidden from sight until then. The roaring slash let out a beast's howl and also his death throes.

Like the wind, the sword that appeared like three claws was... no, it was even faster than the wind.

It diagonally tore through Kazuma's abdomen diagonally.

"————————————!!"

A piercing scream gushed out from Kazuma's throat.

His abomen had been gouged, roughly cleaved. Like his choking throat, it spat out dark blood. Kazuma, filled with shock and hatred, glared at Tomonori.

"Bastard... DON'T UNDERESTIMATE MEEEEEE!"

Still penetrating Tomonori's stomach, the chains once again thrust mercilessly and threw Tomonori's body onto the floor.

This time, Tomonori didn't scream or groan. He was already past the state where he could raise his voice. His battered body was pulled down by the chains and laid upside down on the floor. On the floor that was shining like mirror, a small fountain was created.

Something was overflowing from his belly. Starting from the back, it dyed Tomonori's clothes and soft fur.

In red. In black.

"...You... Only... you..."

Tomonori groaned with an inaudible voice that almost faded away. Piercing the grotesque sword through the middle of the fountain, he tried to raise his body which was full of wounds.

Hihi'irokane, the family treasure that had been taken without permission. Everything was done to kill Kazuma. Until it was accomplished, he couldn't afford to fall.

Still... that thought was also in vain. Tomonori's body lost its strength and once more sank in the middle of the dark red pool of blood.

Aiming at the body that had now used all its strength, Kazuma mercilessly threw kicks using his hard leather shoes.

"Don't... SCREW AROUND! HUUH!?"

Along with dull sound, Tomonori's body was trembling in shock. Suddenly, the spilled blood flowed even faster across the floor; it soaked Kazuma's shoes.

With the stained shoes, Kazuma repeatedly kicked the beastkin's body. The toe gouged the wounds openings, making wretched noises.

"Hey, what's wrong li'l' cat!? Can't stand? Oh, you can't stand anymore? I'm still standing straight though. Hey hey, didn't you say you want to kill me!?"

Tomonori shook the tip of his nose in fury and disgrace. With a cloudy pair of eyes, he glared at Terumi. Those eyes still hadn't parted with the killing intent, but his body couldn't move again even one inch.

The feeling of helplessness excited Kazuma.

"Hyahahaha. Wow, that sure looks nice. You hate me? Want to kill me? Hate me more! Hatehatehatehatehatehate! Scream you want to kill me!"

As resentment burned in his loud laughter, Kazuma trampled on Tomonori's back especially violently. The bursting noise left a strong smell of iron.

Furthermore, Kazuma held his hands out toward the motionless Tomonori. Countless shadows of serpents appeared from Kazuma's feet. With the vigor as if swarming over bait, they ate into Tomonori.

Moreover, he kicked many, many times... Then Kazuma unexpectedly lost his balance and took several steps back and took a breath all of a sudden.

"Haa, haa, ha...ku, gu... cough..."

Large quantities of blood spilled again from the wound on his stomach and fell onto the floor. With disturbed breathing, his throat became jarred and his body shivered.

"Dammit... Seriously... Don't mess with me... you shitty cat."

Despite Kazuma's shout, the room in the deepest part of the Cathedral was quiet.

The person who stood on the blood-stained floor was Kazuma alone.

Beside him, there was only Tomonori who remained collapsed on the floor.

There was no sight of Terumi.

He never disappeared. From the beginning, Terumi never existed in this place.

Kazuma was the body. Terumi was the spirit. If so, then the one who had physical form was Kazuma.

It had always been like that. It had always been from the time Kazuma first met Terumi. Kazuma was the only one who had physical form. Terumi and Kazuma's consciousness had fused. Even when they rebuked Tomonori by turns a while ago, it was only Kazuma who stood there in reality.

Kazuma started to walk, dragging his body. A part of the blood-stained shoes made stiff noises as he treaded the particularly cold floor.

If he remained here, eventually someone might notice something strange and send over the Ten Sages. He couldn't afford to face the Ten Sages in this condition. He had to flee quickly.

Tomonori didn't move. He was dead.

After resentfully giving him a glance, Kazuma reached his hand toward the hall's entrance. The white jacket of the academy's uniform and the pale, thin arm extending from it were wet and stained with something sticky.

His feet were staggering. He could die. It was a serious matter.

Would the thing he had finally obtained, the thing that had returned just simply be gone?

This place was no more than a stopping point of the long, long history.

But before Kazuma could get out of the hall, a shadow even taller than himself appeared.

"Wha..."

The appearance was unexpected. It was a miscalculation.

Kazuma clicked his tongue.

In front of the elevator stood the figure of a man wearing an expensive looking butler suit that didn't feel appropriate within the Mages' Guild. It was a muscular man with long hair tied at the back.

No sooner had he seen Kazuma, he put himself on guard and glared at Kazuma with golden eyes similar to that of a beast.

A man Kazuma... no, Terumi knew.

"Bastard... Valkenhayn..."

Valkenhayn. The werewolf who was serving as Clavis Alucard's butler and had been living for a thousand years.

Immediately after Terumi said his name, Valkenhayn moved. Lowering his tall figure, he struck forwards.

Even though it was a speed lesser than Tomonori's, Kazuma couldn't handle it right now.

The heavy attack hit his thin chest, then his temple felt the strong grip as it grabbed his skull. Following that, the back of his head was knocked onto the solid wall.

The noise of the crack against the stone wall drowned the noise

Kazuma let out. Strength left his whole body. The flowing blood smeared his clothes severely.

"Damn... it..."

After the impact, his trembling lips could only say that much...

Like a doll losing its support, Terumi
Kazuma
fell to the floor.

Part 5

Later that night, Trinity woke up in her dormitory room.

Nine was also in the room, looking like she was about to cry.

It seemed one of the students who had come to the academy had, by chance, discovered Trinity collapsed in the corridor. Nine explained that she was taken to infirmary before being carried to the dormitory room later. Nine recounted that the doctor said that her body had taken a blow, but fortunately there was no injury that could have disabled her.

"...The seithr in the city has been disposed of. As for the barrier's restoration, it's only a simple measure but it was finished. The genuine restoration will be carried out starting tomorrow. Although I said that, it was just finished a little while ago."

Sitting on a chair beside the bed with her legs crossed, Nine continued to explain the situation while feeling relief from the bottom of her heart as there was no issue with Trinity's consciousness.

Trinity laid down on the bed and looked up at her close friend as she listened to her explanation.

"Now... What time... is it?"

Trinity's regular slow tone of voice was even slower; partly because her condition wasn't good.

Without urging her, Nine listened until the end and then looked at a clock above desk.

"It's past midnight... Well past 2."

"You've been working until this late..."

"It didn't take until morning, so it's good."

"Don't take the Ten Sages lightly," said Nine winking with her right eye.

Inside the soft bedding, Trinity smiled slightly.

"Even though you're tired, you still came here... I'm sorry～."

"Stupid. It's natural. ...I can't help it until I know what happened with you."

In Nine's smile, a sad gloom seeped.

For Nine, Celica and Trinity were special.

It was the same for Trinity. That was why she currently truly felt sorry for making Nine worry.

Or so she thought.

But as she couldn't help but ask, Trinity gently said.

"...How about Kazuma-san?"

Tension ran through Nine's face. Trinity could guess why.

After a while passed, Nine indifferently answered while choosing her words carefully.

"He disappeared. There were signs of that man having entered the Cathedral. In the deepest room... marks of a struggle were found. But no one was there."

"...I see."

Trinity couldn't hide her dejection.

She vaguely felt that it would turn out this way. If she were asked since when, Trinity herself didn't know.

Nine looked into her best friend's eyes that were clouded with sadness. She put her hands on Trinity's feeble white hands.

"Regarding that man... Let's stop thinking about him. As of now, we wouldn't be able to do anything."

Who on earth was that man? It was the question Trinity and Nine had always wondered.

He left a truly dangerous impression.

Nine might have been fearing that that danger would engulf its surroundings.

Trinity might have been fearing that that danger would hurt Kazuma.

In the end, Nine's hunch became realized.

Trinity tried to look straight at Nine as much as she could and nodded. She didn't want to give further worries to Nine, especially with what she had said.

But just a few words.

"Nine. Even then... the time spent together with Kazuma-san... Everything of it didn't feel like a lie to me. He..."

Every morning, He would greet her. It was just sometimes, but he spoke with a truly gentle voice.

The feeling of warmth also existed.

Soon, the night would be late.

Since the Mages' Guild had calmed down a little, Nine said that she was going to go searching for Celica who had left the island.

Trinity promised to go with her.

In the corner of her heart... she wondered if she could find something related to Kazuma's whereabouts within the vast world,

faintly hoping for it.

The castle where night stood for eternity... The Alucard family's castle.

Tonight, the silver moon also decorated the lasting eternal night sky. It gently illuminated the ivy-covered old castle and its vast, abandoned garden.

In the basement of the castle where moonlight couldn't reach, was Valkenhayn along with his master Clavis.

"Is it truly okay to not kill him?"

The vicinity was dark without any presences at all. As a magic light lit an antique lantern, certain figures emerged into the long, continuous hallway.

There was a room at the end of the hallway. It was a small room made of old timber that somewhat clashed with the solid stone of the old castle.

Inside the room, a tall young man wearing a blood-stained white jacket, black pants, and a waist-length mantle was tied by magical chains. He might be unconscious as there was no strength in his body.

"...We cannot kill that man. If we intervene, he would leave the flesh once more and disappear to somewhere."

Gazing at the motionless thin young man who remained sitting inside the wooden room, Clavis grievously spoke.

"...We are powerless."

Thus, a jail was created. He couldn't do anything but put a secure

lock on the door to prevent the beast from getting outside.

After Valkenhayn closed the door, Clavis raised his wrinkled fingers and drew a pattern midair. As the ancient words turned into bindings, the drawn pattern clung onto the door and sealed the thin wood board.

A secure seal that only Clavis could handle.

"Now... We should mourn for Tomonori."

Shifting his gaze, Clavis looked at Valkenhayn.

Valkenhayn lightly bowed.

"Why did Tomonori... go as far as carrying Hihi'irokane and selfishly..."

There was obvious regret in Valkenhayn's mutter.

That time when Tomonori went to the underground of the Cathedral was all done by his own judgment.

When he thought about it, it also made Clavis somewhat succumb into regret.

If only he had noticed it sooner and made Tomonori return. Or possibly, if he had sent Valkenhayn sooner, then... The friend who had unyielding stubbornness as if a single swing of a sword might not cost his life.

"...It seems he could not resist. He thought that there are things only he can do. A man who could not help but to accomplish it on his own"

Clavis' answer was mixed with a sigh, before he lowering his eyelids.

"Let us go, Valkenhayn. We have something to achieve... Just like him."

"...Understood, Clavis-sama."

Turning his back on the sealed door, Valkenhayn pushed Clavis' wheelchair and returned to the hallway.

Each time they advanced, doors were closed as if shutting down the inner part. Every single one of them was also sealed by Clavis.

Listening to the sound of the last door at the end of the hallway being closed, Valkenhayn strongly thought that those doors might never be opened again.

And deep, deep, deep, deep in the dark.

Within the locked seal.

A young man who was trapped alone laughed loudly.

He ignored the pain of his wounds and distress from the binding. Rather than despairing over the circumstances, he seemed to hold hopes for a promising future.

"HYAAHAHAHAHA. The countdown's commencing, senile bloodsucker! When you die, I'll get out of here... You'll realize the real beginning starts after you kick the bucket. HYAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Within the cold seal.

He continued to laugh in ecstasy indefinitely.

Epilogue

December, 2106 AD——.

Six years ago, a demon called the Black Beast appeared all of a sudden. Because of it, the world collapsed, losing its order and balance. It also lost its usual climate along with seasons.

It was also true for today. Despite that December was about to end, the coolness of the weather was as if it was autumn. Presently, it was unlikely for thick clothes to soon become the fashion.

It was a fine early afternoon with many clouds, but they didn't obstruct the sunlight. Among a forest in mountain, a girl was wandering around.

White tunic, black pleated skirt, and a long mantle to match the skirt. Her long tawny hair was tied in a high position, making a ponytail. The eyes that had the color of wet soil didn't show any confusion as they were gazed ever forward. She advanced further and further, walking unhesitatingly. But where she was walking was a path without any traces of animals. It was a completely trackless path.

The girl's name was Celica A. Mercury.

She had secretly rushed away from the island where she lived together with her sister, heading to a country called Japan which was ruined six years ago.

If she went there, she might meet her long lost father. While embracing such an expectation, she was currently aiming to go to a harbor where the only boat which would head to Japan existed.

But the road to the harbor was unexpectedly steep. From what she had heard at the hotel last night, no one ever said about climbing a mountain.

"I'm sure when I get out of this forest, I should be able to see a large road. Okay, I'll do my best."

While making her way up to cross the root of a thick tree, Celica continued on and on without getting discouraged by the forest's scenery and cheered her bright self on.

It was as if her feelings had reached the forest as the field of vision on the path gradually opened up. Celica noticed it immediately and her smile bloomed like a flower.

Delighted, she spontaneously made her pace faster. After getting out, she would first search for a place to sit and rest.

But after she put a single step out of the forest, Celica stopped.

It was a white-haired young man wearing a stunning bright red jacket.

His age was a little older than Celica's. Judging from his tall appearance, he had a well-proportioned figure. Besides that, something might have happened as there were serious injuries all over him.

"Oh no...!"

Flustered, Celica went around the young man so as to block the sunlight.

There was movement in his chest. His complexion wasn't so pale that he might lose his life. However, that was because the young man had quite a lot of physical strength. If it was exhausted...

It might be that he had noticed Celica's shadow since the young man's eyelids moved slightly, opening his eye weakly. It was a green eye. A stern but also gentle color.

Thank god, it's faint but he's conscious. First of all I'll heal the big wounds, and then he should take a good rest.

Celica smiled and spoke to give encouragement.

"Umm, hang on please. ...Are you all right?"

In the dark times with an uncertain tomorrow.

In the days with unstable climates where winter didn't seem to appear.

In that moment the wheel of fate began to turn suddenly.

Celica met him.

Afterword

...This is reality.

I'm aware I was drawing a scenery I've never seen before.

Dragging my muddy consciousness, I collapsed on the bed. I got up a few hours later and gave a hit on the keyboard sitting in front of a square window. I don't know how many times I have repeated that cycle.

I pictured the situation with a mind so fuzzy that it felt like I'm dreaming. My fingers somehow turned the pictures into words. But it was too slow to make any progress. Before long, the promised date passed...

The result was satisfactory. I thought that it would do. I felt that I could do it if I tried. At least, it was a beautiful sight for myself.

But the next day. He spoke in the small window of Skype.

"I didn't really get this. Can you fix it?"

——And just like that, the six chapters of the script became to this state.

I have learned something. Writing things using only the influence of unclear thinking pattern would make it nonsensical. Like writing the contents of a dream. And then I only noticed it after being pointed out by another person.

For the readers from the previous volume BlazBlue Phase 0, long time no see. For the readers who just picked the book for the first time, nice to meet you. Hello, my name is Komao Mako and I'm the

author.

The farce at the beginning was an act after I finished writing the first draft. I might exaggerate a bit when I said that the supervisor, Mori Producer, disagreed with me and told me to do a whole retake, even though I'm sure I have nailed it.

The so called situation of 'the only person who understands it is the writer'. I never imagined for the day where I strongly guilty of it to arrive. Thank you for pointing it out, Mori-san and the editor.

Let's set the long introduction aside.

You might have guessed after seeing it the first time, but this book, BlazBlue Phase Shift 1, is the novelization of the 2D competitive fighting game BlazBlue which was released by Arc System Works corporation. Also, the novelization now has two volumes.

By the way, the original BlazBlue's recent release, Continuum Shift II, is super popular of being played in game centers! It can be played recently on PSP and 3DS, too.

Even if it's only a portable console, the graphic's really clear. The reward from reading the scenario is upgraded even more. Although it's only hand-sized, you will still get excited enough. But getting carelessly immersed during travelling will make you keep passing your stops often, so be careful. It's a bitter memory.

Also if you can enjoy it together with the first novel BlazBlue Phase 0, I'd be truly grateful.

Aah, this second book makes me exhilarated.

If the first book's popular, then a second book will also... That kind of talk was frequently mentioned, but to think that it was realized. Even now, the happiness made my feet feel light.

Furthermore, did the front cover give you a vague hint about the

leading man?

Oh, just what am I hiding? I also really liked that green-haired man.

From the beginning, I more or less was full of 'Oh gosh I'm going to write about him' kind of unpleasant excitement. But as for the green man... I wonder if he has a fairly characteristic way of speaking.

I wrote and wrote, but the circumstances were astonishing like 'it's different, not like this...'. To tell you the truth, each time the green man started to talk at the second half, it'd give me a headache. Just what's with that person?

There were many tiresome things, but it was sooo fun to write various kinds of the green man.

In the middle of writing, I thought that no way it's gonna end in my lifetime. But now, writing plenty of that man... left a clean aftertaste.

But it took many hours... I really felt guilty toward everyone in the staff. I'll do an introspection. Really.

Have you seen the contents yet? What do you think?

Unlike BlazBlue's original work, it was school-themed. Personally, it felt fresh and interesting, but my heart pounds when thinking about how it will come out for the original BlazBlue's fans. I hope you'd find it fun.

...Well then. It's just a routine but since I think this would be the place to say thanks again, I'd like to give a few words of gratitude.

To the editor in charge who gave me encouragement, sometimes fiercely. And to Arc System Works' PR Mineshima-san who told all kinds of inside stories and always being cheerful when we met. I

give my deepest gratitude to the two of you. Both of you always reminded me to have fun.

Also to Katou-san who had drawn the illustrations. I'm sorry for the terrible schedule even though you're already busy. And thanks to you, too. I treasure the rough illustrations I stole and brought home.

And then to the producer, Mori-san. Thank you very much! I'm happy that I could write this novel! You were harsh when I couldn't write good enough, but it's really enjoyable!

The last one of course is to everyone who bought this book. In other words, you. Thank you very much. I hope you will look forward to me again after this. Please enjoy the world of BlazBlue to the fullest!

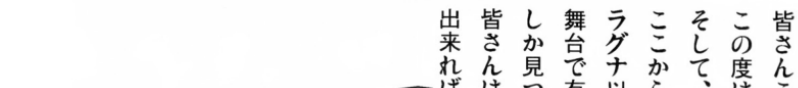
~Komao Mako

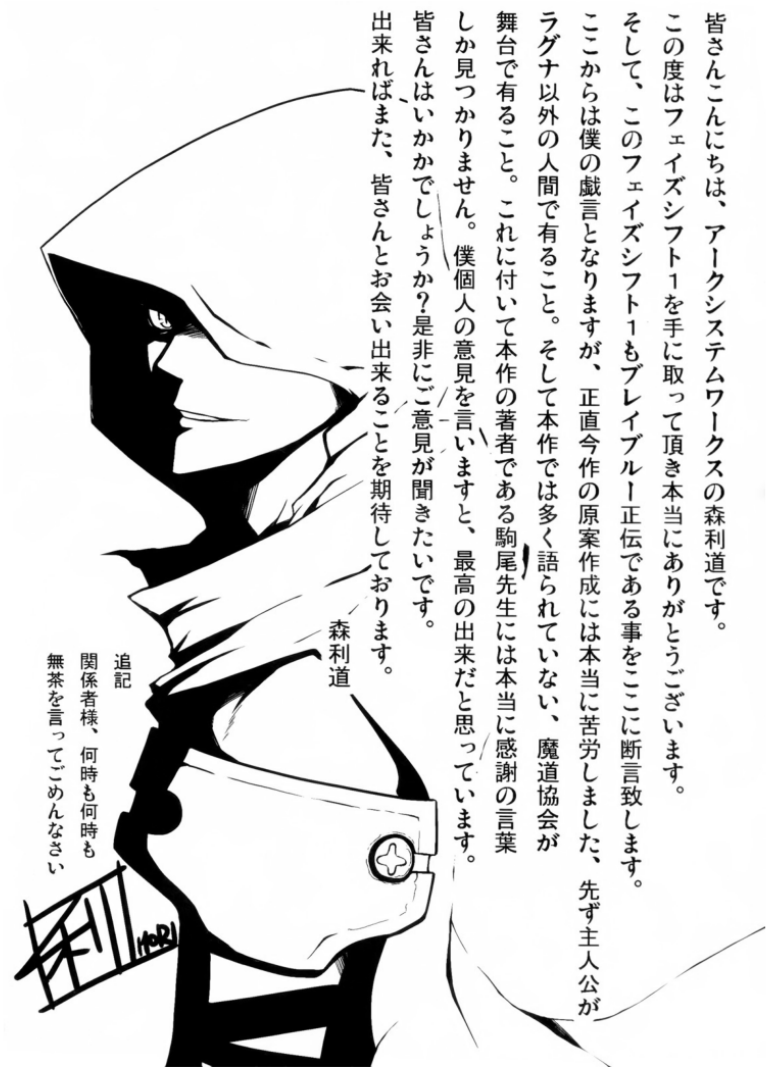
Congratulations on the second novel of BlazBlue!

This is Katou. I was in charge of the illustration for this time, too.

I'm kinda like doing monochrome illustrations, so this time I got to draw them again. Since I couldn't draw many monochrome illustrations in the game, it was enjoyable for me.

Komao-sama and the editor also did a good job this time.





Hello everyone, this is Mori Shinichi from Arc System Works.

On this occasion, I'd like to thank you for picking up Phase Shift 1.

I confirm here that this Phase Shift is also a life story of BlazBlue.

Starting here is just my nonsense, but honestly, I had a hard time with the original draft for the work this time. First, the protagonist was someone other than Ragna. Then something that I hadn't been

told much, about Mage's Guild being the setting. I just can't find enough gratitude for the author involved in this book, Komao-sensei. In my personal opinion, the book came out amazing.

How about all of you? I want to hear your opinion by all means.

If possible, I hope we will be able to meet.

~Mori Shinichi

PS:

For all the staff, I'm sorry for always, always saying absurd things.